Shakespony: Twelfth Night

By: DisneyFanatic2364

After being shipwrecked in Illyrimane, Applejack disguises herself as a stallion and serves the Duke Spike, who sends her to woo the Lady Rarity for him. Applejack is soon shocked to discover that the unicorn has fallen for her instead! How will she fix this tangled knot? More importantly, how will she win the dragon she loves when he thinks she's a boy?

Status: complete

Published: 2013-10-10

Updated: 2014-03-16

Words: 54380

Chapters: 16

Rated: Fiction T - Language: English - Genre: Romance/Humor - Characters: [Applejack, Spike, Rarity] - Reviews: 186 - Favs: 183 - Follows: 87

Original source: https://www.fanfiction.net/s/9752541/1/Shakespony-Twelfth-Night

Exported with the assistance of FicHub.net

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Introduction
Shipwrecked
The Duke
Settling In
We're All Fools Here
Accidentally in Love
Longing
Courtship
Life and Love
Midnight Plotting
A Knot Too Hard to Untie
Lime Green Stockings
Mistaken Identity
Imprisonment
A Change in the Circumstances
Conflicts and Resolutions
Epilogue

Shipwrecked

So my latest multi-chapter fic stars Applejack and is based on my favorite play *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare. Not only did I feel Applejack fit the character of Viola, but Viola is my favorite character in drama while AJ is my favorite character in MLP! By the way, this is major AU. Hope you enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own My Little Pony. If I did, Applejack would have more episodes!

She was drowning. There was nothing but darkness. She struggled to get to the surface, her legs kicking the water furiously, but the sea was stronger.

The storm came unexpectedly. The ship was tossed by the ferocious black waves. It was only moments ago she was holding her brother and sister as they hid below deck.

Then lightning struck the mast, setting the ship on fire. The captain ordered every pony on deck and to abandon ship. She and her siblings rushed to the lifeboats, but the force of the sea tossed her sister overboard. Her brother bravely dove in after her while she watched from the rail.

The captain told her to come to the lifeboat, but she refused to abandon her siblings. She put up a fight as he pulled her from the rail, but in the end, the captain succeeded. He ushered her to the lifeboat where the rest of the crew had gathered. She struggled against him, screaming for her brother and sister, but the captain managed to shove her in.

There was no time to lower the lifeboat, so the captain and the first mate cut the ropes and the party landed in the water with a splash. The mare scanned the vicious tempest for her siblings and cried out for them. She received no answer.

The sailors got out the oars and prepared to paddle, but they were not fast enough to dodge the wave coming toward them. The black wall crashed down on them, throwing the tiny boat into the ship, shattering it to pieces.

Soon she found herself deep underwater.

Her mouth was firmly closed, her lungs burning from lack of oxygen. Where was the light? She could not see it!

Just a couple more strokes! Come on! You can make it!

She could not hold it any longer. Her mouth opened, allowing the water to flood down her throat and into her lungs. Her body began to sink, her vision fading.

This was the end. In a few moments, she would be joining her parents. If only she had defied her brother's wishes. If only she had not accepted the Prince's invitation. How ironic that she was to be punished for her obedience.

Then she felt a foreleg wrap around her waist and she was lifted toward the surface. She gasped for air the minute her head was above the waves, but she was still semi-conscious.

Her rescuer dragged her along the water and lifted her onto a wooden plank big enough to hold one pony. She opened her eyes and saw the faint outline of a stallion. Then she heard a loud thud and she felt the stallion's hoof slip from hers.

"No," she cried weakly. "No!"

She repeated the word until everything went black.

The sea is always calm the morning after a tempest, despite the horror that occurred in the night. Scattered along the beach were what remained of a ship called *The Mela* . A muscular blue minotaur lay sprawled on his stomach, soaked and panting for air.

He glanced around for signs of life. Was he the lone survivor? Had

the others perished in the wreck? Were the sweet children he was supposed to deliver safely to Prance gone for good?

His ears perked up as he heard a faint cough. He struggled to rise and jogged down the shoreline. He gasped when he saw the limp body of a mare with orange fur. The waves lapped at her, soaking her tattered gown. Her blonde hair was dirty from the sand. As the minotaur came closer he recognized the poor mare.

"Lady Applejacqueline!"

He lifted the mare out of the water and leaned her against a large, dry rock. Sea water spilt from her mouth as she coughed fiercely. Once she could breathe properly, she finally opened her green eyes and looked upon her savior.

"Captain Iron Will?"

The minotaur smiled. "Don't worry, milady. You're safe now."

Applejacqueline grinned in gratitude, but then her eyes widened in worry.

"Where are my brother and sister?"

The captain's face fell. The mare bolted to her hooves and called in all directions.

"Macintosh! Applebloom!"

She ran up and down the beach, searching for her lost siblings.

"Big Macintosh! Applebloom!"

Her eyes glistened with tears as she assumed the worst. Had the sea taken her brave brother and her sweet sister? Was she alone in the world?

"Look!" Iron Will cried.

He pointed out to a floating speck on the water. Applejacqueline squinted and gasped at the sight of a small, yellow, red-headed filly

clinging desperately to a wooden plank, crying out in fear.

"Applebloom!" Applejacqueline shouted.

She stepped into the sea, only for the captain to pull her back.

"No, milady!" he insisted. "Iron Will shall get her!"

He dove into the waves and swam toward the filly. Applebloom recognized the captain and called out to him.

"Captain! Hurry! I think I saw a shark!"

"Hold...on...Apple...bloom..." Iron Will shouted between strokes. "Iron...Will...is...coming!"

The filly gripped onto the wood. She shrieked as a dorsal fin floated by.

"Help!"

"Hang on, Applebloom!" Applejacqueline called. "Oh, Captain, please hurry!"

The filly's fear increased as another fin appeared. She tried to climb onto the board but lost her balance and fell into the water again. The minotaur scooped her up and flung her onto his back. Applebloom tightened her forelegs around his neck.

"Don't let go," he said.

The filly did not argue. Applejacqueline let out a sigh of relief as the two approached the beach. Applebloom screamed and pointed as the dorsal fin appeared again. The sea creature then leapt out of the water and flipped in the air. It was only a dolphin. Applebloom blushed in embarrassment while Iron Will laughed.

The minotaur panted as he reached the shore. Applejacqueline caught her sister as she slid off his back.

"Applebloom!" she said, shaking her. "Are you alright, little sis? Say somethin'!"

"Are we there yet?" the filly said wearily.

Applejacqueline cried out for joy as she embraced her. "Oh, thank Celestia you're okay!" She turned to the minotaur. "Thank you, Captain."

"No thanks is necessary," Iron Will said, straightening himself up.

Applebloom glanced around. "Where...where's Big Macintosh?"

The mare gasped. "Oh no."

She got up and began running down the beach again. "Big Mac! Big Macintosh! Big brother! Answer me!"

She kept calling and calling until her throat was sore. She looked out at the sea, but saw nothing but water and dolphins.

"Why won't you anwer me?" she whispered, tears forming in her eyes.

She glanced up at the minotaur as he laid his hand on her shoulder. His face was solemn.

"Iron Will does not think he made it."

"No. NO!"

She collapsed to her knees and sobbed.

"Not Macintosh! Not my brother!" She looked at the sea with angry eyes. "You...you stupid water! What'd I ever do to you that you take away my brother?! Why? WHY?!"

She buried her face in her hooves. She remembered now. It was her brother who had pulled her from the water and placed her on the board. He must have hit his head and drowned.

He perished saving her life.

"My fault," she murmured. "It's my fault."

Applebloom slowly approached her and hugged her around the

waist. She was weeping too.

"Don't cry, big sis," she said softly. "We made it, didn't we? Maybe Big Macintosh made it too! Maybe one of them dolphins saved 'im! Like in that story about the musician, Lyra! Maybe they saved the others as well!"

Applejacqueline looked down at her sister's innocent face. Applebloom was too young to understand that their brother was never coming back. Nevertheless, her naivety brought hope to the mare. She ruffled her sister's red mane with a smile.

"You may be right, little sis," she said. "If we survived, there's a chance Big Macintosh did too. Who knows? Maybe he's already made it to the nearest town."

Applejacqueline glanced around the unfamiliar beach. "Where are we, anyway?"

The captain gasped. "Iron Will knows this place! This is Illyrimane! Iron Will was born here!"

"So you know yerr way around?"

"You bet Iron Will does! The nearest town is less than a mile away!"

"Illyrimane?" Applebloom repeated. "I remember Zecora pointin' to this place on the map. It's miles away from Haystings and is not even close to Prance! How are we gonna get home, Applejacqueline?"

The mare grimaced. "I don't know, little sister. I say we find who's in charge here and ask for help."

"That won't be so easy," Iron Will said. "No pony's going to believe you two are of noble birth, not dressed like that."

Applejacqueline looked over their tattered clothes. "You're right. Ponies may easily mistake us for beggars, or worse."

"But we're not beggars!" Applebloom insisted. "Our father was the Duke of Haystings!"

"We can't prove that, Applebloom. Besides, you and I both know with or without the ball gown, I hardly look the part of a lady."

"I wish you'd stop sayin' that!"

"It's true. Every pony back in Haystings says so. If they don't believe I'm noble, the ponies of Illyrimane certainly won't."

"Then what do we do?"

"Iron Will suggests we find an inn," the minotaur declared, "and rest for the night."

"But we've lost everything!" Applejacqueline explained. "Our gold, our gowns..."

"Not *everything* !" Applebloom said, pointing. "Look!"

A red trunk with the Apple Family crest on it had just washed ashore. Seeing that the lock was broken, Applejacqueline opened it up. Inside were Macintosh's clothes. Tears formed in her eyes at seeing them, but she shook away her sadness and looked through the chest. Beneath the garments were five pouches of gold. She counted the money to be a total of fifty bits. It was not much, but it was enough to get them a meal and a place to sleep for the night.

Applejacqueline could not help but smile. It was like a gift from Heaven. She looked up at the sky.

"Thank you, big brother."

The three castaways were lucky to find lodging at an inn called The Sugar Cube, run by a young couple with newborn twins.

"So where are you all from?" the mare, Mrs. Cake, asked as she served them their meal.

"We're from Hay..." Applebloom started to say.

Applejacqueline covered her sister's mouth. "We're travelin'."

"Ah, I see," the blue mare said. "Well, I understand if you want to keep to yourselves, but might I ask what two young fillies are doing with a...?"

She paused as she glanced up at the minotaur.

"He's our uncle," Applejacqueline said quickly. "Well, he's not exactly our uncle, but he's our guardian. He was a friend of our father's. When Father died, this minotaur here took us in."

"Oh."

Mrs. Cake asked no further questions and left the table.

"Why did you...?" Applebloom started to ask.

"Shush!" Applejacqueline whispered.

The filly spoke quieter. "Why did you lie to her? You never lie!"

"Applebloom, don't you realize how much danger we're in? If any pony knew who we were, they might use that knowledge to their advantage!"

"Your sister's right, young filly," Iron Will said. "The streets are full of thieves and kidnappers. You could be mugged or held for ransom. Illyrimane is no place for two young ladies to be on their own."

"Can't you take care of us?" Applebloom inquired.

"Alas, Iron Will has little money to care for you."

"We scarcely have enough for a day," Applejacqueline added.

"This is terrible!" the filly exclaimed. "Every pony back home is probably worried sick! And I can only imagine how yerr betrothed is feelin'!

The mare groaned. "He's *not* my betrothed!"

"Still, he'll be pretty upset if we don't show up at the docks."

"He wouldn't give a hoof if our muzzles fell clean off our faces.

Forget the Prince. Until we can get word to Haystings, we better find some work."

The filly blinked. "Work? You mean for money?"

"Of course. You know it'll be no sweat for me."

Applejacqueline might have been a mare of noble birth, but she was no stranger to work. As a filly, she would escape from her etiquette lessons by dressing up as a servant girl. Naturally, the other maids assumed she was really a servant and had her do the housework. She had been reluctant at first, but soon found that work relaxed her. Even as a mare, she preferred picking the apples in the orchard herself than having some pony else doing it.

"There are not that many honest ways for mares to make money," Iron Will commented. "Unless you don't mind cooking or cleaning."

The mare shrugged. "I don't mind."

"But you shouldn't have to work, Applejacqueline," said Applebloom. "You're a lady of the..."

"Hush! Captain, who's in charge here?"

"That would be the Duke Spike," Iron Will replied.

Applejacqueline paused. "Duke Spike, eh? I think I've heard of him before. Is it true that he's not a pony, but a...dragon?"

"Indeed, he is."

"How does a dragon become a duke?" Applebloom questioned.

"The late Duke of Illyrimane found the dragon as an infant while hunting in the woods. He was out in the middle of nowhere and since the Duke had always wanted a son, he raised him as his own. Naturally, Duke Spike inherited his title. He lives with his adoptive sister, the Lady Twilight Sparkle."

"You think they're lookin' to hire a maid?" Applejacqueline inquired.

"Iron Will does not know. The Duke does not usually hire mares and the Lady Twilight keeps no hoofmaids. They're not a social pair, you see? They seek only the company of each other, and, " the minotaur snickered, "in the Lady Twilight's case, her books."

"What does the Duke Spike do?"

"Nothing much. Last time Iron Will was here, there was a rumor going around that he was in love with the Lady Rarity. She's the daughter of a late count, who left her and her younger sister in the care of their brother. Unfortunately, he passed away not too long ago. The Lady Rarity took his death rather badly. Since then, she refuses to let anyone see her face and dresses for mourning."

Applejacqueline hung her head. "I can understand that."

She knew all too well what it was like to lose a brother. Applejacqueline figured since she could relate to this mare, she obtain a job as a maid and since the lady had a younger sister, Applebloom could serve her. Even though it meant Applebloom would have to work more than she was accustomed to, at least they would be living in a manor, a setting they were familiar with.

"You think she would accept our services?"

"Iron Will doubts that. She will not admit any pony or any dragon."

The mare sighed. "That is unfortunate."

When they were finished with their meal, the three retired upstairs. The innkeeper's wife had lent them some needle and thread to mend their dresses. Applejacqueline groaned as she tried to get the string through the needle's eye.

"Here, let me try," Applebloom offered.

The filly licked the end of the thread and slid it through the needle.

"I was never good with those things," Applejacqueline said.

As her little sister began stitching her skirt, the mare started thinking of where they were to go from here. The captain had to return to

Haystings and report the wreck, but they did not have enough money for all of them to make the journey. Applejacqueline was the oldest sibling now and was responsible for her sister. She had promised her mother on her deathbed to take care of Applebloom and to not let anything happen to her.

They could not stay in Illyrimane. A constable could find them roaming the streets one day and get the wrong impression. With her garments, Applejacqueline could be mistaken for a prostitute and hauled off to prison and poor Applebloom would be placed in an orphanage. She did not say any of this to her sister, because she did not want her to worry. Still, she could not bear the thought of being separated from all she had left in the world.

She needed to find a way to earn money so they could stay together.

"We damaged these really bad," Applebloom observed, snipping the thread with her teeth. "Too bad none of our clothes survived the wreck. Can't we buy some new gowns?"

"We need to save the money for food, sister."

"But how do ya expect to find work lookin' like this?! Ya might as well be wearin' Big Macintosh's britches!"

As the words fell from her sister's mouth, an idea formed in Applejacqueline's head. The grin on her face was joyful and a tad mischievous. Applebloom gazed at her in concern.

"You alright, big sister?"

Without warning, the mare jumped off the bed and rushed to Iron Will's room.

"Captain!" she shouted from the doorway. "I just got the most brilliant plan!"

"Whoa, whoa, milady!" the minotaur said, putting his hands on the jumping mare's shoulders. "What's all the excitement?"

"Yeah," Applebloom said, peering out from behind her. "What's this

all about?"

"Shut the door," Applejacqueline whispered.

The filly did so and joined the two on the bed.

"Captain," Applejacqueline began. "You were right when you said this was no place for two young ladies to be on their own."

"It isn't," Iron Will said, shaking his head.

"Well, then we won't *be* two young ladies!"

"What are ya sayin', sister?" Applebloom inquired.

"Applebloom, you remember how Aunt Orange used to say I might as well have been a boy?"

"Yeah, just because you weren't afraid to get dirty."

"And that was," she mimicked their aunt's voice, "'so unladylike'!"

The filly laughed.

"Well, why don't we make Aunt Orange's wish come true?"

"Huh?"

Applejacqueline turned to Iron Will. "Captain, you have been a good friend to our family for years and you've helped us so much already that I hate to ask you for more, but I expect you to keep this secret and help me in this plan."

"Iron Will shall keep his mouth shut," the minotaur said.

"Then listen carefully." She glanced around and gestured for them to come closer. "I will serve the Duke Spike as a pagecolt."

"A pagecolt?!" Applebloom gasped.

"It pays better than bein' a maid."

"But in order to be a pagecolt, don't you have to be a...a boy?"

Applejacqueline grinned. "That's right. You need a stallion to look after you, sister. If the Duke accepts my services, I'm sure he'll take you as well."

"But...how?"

"Macintosh's clothes. And if we cut my mane a tiny bit..."

"What about yerr muzzle? It's not a stallion's."

The mare put her hoof to her nose. "Oh. Didn't think about that. Well, it was a good plan..."

"Now hold on!" Iron Will interrupted. He looked at the mare through a square he had made with his hands. "This could work."

Applejacqueline's face lit up. "You mean you'll help?"

"Iron Will can make you look like a stallion! You will be the Duke's pagecolt until Iron Will can get word to Haystings!"

The mare cried out for joy and flung her forelegs around the minotaur's waist. "Thank ya, Captain! How can I ever repay you?"

"No thanks is necessary. Applebloom, get a pair of scissors! We're going to make a stallion out of this mare!"

"Alright, you ready?" Applejacqueline called out from behind the screen.

"Ready!" Applebloom declared.

She and the captain gasped at the pony that stepped out. Not even Applebloom could believe it was a mare she was looking at. Her straw-colored mane and tail were cut short in a style similar to how their brother's had been. She wore a pair of tan trousers, a white collared shirt and a blue jacket with gold buttons. The clothes had been resized, thanks to Applebloom.

"What do you think?" Applejacqueline asked in a voice deep for a

mare but shrill for a stallion.

The filly grinned. "I think I have a new brother! Why, if you were red and taller, I'd almost think you were Big Macintosh! But...yerr muzzle..."

"We'll just tell them that she, I mean he, got his looks from his mother and is sensitive about it," Iron Will explained with a slight chuckle.

"But do you think the Duke will buy it?" the mare turned stallion inquired.

"If you can fool me, Applejacqueline," Applebloom said, "you can fool any pony!"

"It's not Applejacqueline anymore, little sister," the mare said as she looked at her new face in the mirror. "It's Applejack."

If you have not read *Twelfth Night* : no, it is not a tragedy.

I don't know why I have Iron Will as the captain. I guess he just fit. As for Applebloom, she's not based on any character in the play. I put her in here as a reason for Applejack donning the disguise of a stallion. I know it's a stretch for her to pass as a stallion, because you can distinctly tell the difference in the show, but hey, just roll with it. Also, I'm not looking for historical accuracy, so the speech is a little more modern.

Why are they from Haystings? It's a ponified version of the English town Hastings, which was Viola's last name in *She's the Man* , the modern version of *Twelfth Night* . BTW, if you haven't seen that movie, see it!

The Duke

I'm sorry if any of the characters are a bit OOC. I combined them with the characters from the play, so they're a bit different.

The Lady Twilight Sparkle was not surprised to find her adoptive brother in the throne room, nor was she surprised to see him lying on the throne, his claw to his head, listening to Octavia play her cello. Since he had laid eyes on the Lady Rarity, this was all he ever did. It got worse each time she rejected him. By the pathetic look in his eyes, she guessed it had happened again.

She worried about him. He should be out, engaging himself in some other activity, reading a book, anything to get his mind off Lady Rarity. It was bad enough that the ponies had mixed feelings towards the idea of a dragon governing their land, but his sulking made him look lazy in the eyes of the citizens.

He hardly admitted any pony, whether it be a peasant seeking aid or a noblepony paying a visit. He ignored the concerns from the City Council and neglected his duties. If he did not clean up his act soon, the Duchy of Illyrimane was sure to fall apart.

The young unicorn shook her head.

"Is this how you're going to spend the rest of your days?" she asked sternly, approaching the dragon. "Wasting yourself away, listening to depressing melodies, pining over that unicorn?"

The Duke Spike sighed. "Music is the food of love. Play on, Octavia."

"I can't believe you! You're supposed to be a duke! A dragon of respect! How can you expect the ponies to respect you when you do nothing but sulk?"

"And I suppose what you do is any better? You spend your days in the library reading those dusty old books! A mare like you should be married by now!"

Twilight grunted. "Don't try and act like Father, Spike! After all, I am older than you."

"But I am the master of this house!" the dragon spat, sitting up in frustration. "You're just jealous that Father left everything to me and not to you!"

The unicorn was taken aback at this insult. Spike sighed guiltily.

"I am sorry, sister," he apologized. "I have not been myself lately."

"I noticed," Twilight said. "Why are you wasting your time with this one mare, anyway? There are plenty of single mares out there who would be happy to..."

"Why do you suppose she will not marry me? I have position, I have wealth..."

"You won't if you keep eating those gems..."

"Does my breath smell? Are my spines crooked?"

"Your breath is fine..."

"Is it because I'm a dragon?"

Twilight said nothing. Spike groaned and turned onto his back again.

"Play it, Octavia," he said gruffly.

The mare was about to play when a knock on the door made everyone's head turn.

"Now what?" Spike huffed.

The door was opened by a goldenrod pegasus in armor. Twilight's face lit up at the sight of him.

"My lord," the guard spoke, "there is a Mister Iron Will to see you,

along with a colt and a filly."

"Whatever they're selling, I'm not interested!" the dragon bellowed. "Can't you see I'm busy?!"

"They said they wish to offer their services."

"I don't care! I don't need any more servants!"

"Spike!" Twilight exclaimed. "It's rude to turn some pony away before hearing their business!"

"Don't tell me what to do, mare!"

"Spike!"

The dragon groaned in annoyance. "Fine! Whatever! Send them in, err...what was your name?"

"Flash Sentry, my lord," the guard responded. "I'll retrieve them."

Before he turned to leave, he met Twilight's eyes, making her blush. The guard returned a minute later with a tall blue minotaur carrying a red trunk, a yellow filly with a red mane and a well-dressed orange stallion with blonde hair and a young face.

Applejack gazed in wonder at the dragon on the throne. His purple scales glinted in the candlelight, his green spines looked soft enough to touch, and when he turned to look at them, she saw his brilliant green reptilian eyes. Even though they were filled with annoyance, she could not help but find them adorable.

She whispered to her male companion. "I didn't think he'd be so...short."

"Dragons grow at a slower rate," Iron Will explained. "He's actually around your age."

She chuckled slightly. "He's kind of cute."

There was silence for a while as the three visitors waited for permission to speak. Twilight glanced at the dragon, hoping he

would say something. He was studying the colt with curiosity. He had the form of a stallion, but his freckled face was almost marish. He had luminous green eyes that reminded the dragon of emeralds.

When it was clear her brother was not going to speak, Twilight spoke instead.

"I bid you all welcome. Allow us to introduce ourselves. I am Lady Twilight Sparkle and this is my adoptive brother, Spike, Duke of Illyrimane."

"They know who we are," the dragon snapped. "The question is who are *they* ?"

Iron Will set down the chest and bowed humbly. "My lord, I am Iron Will, a sea captain. These two are orphans who have served me well for many years, but I cannot pay them any longer. They seek employment from you, my lord."

"And they are...?"

Applejack stepped forth and crossed her hooves to curtsy. Applebloom coughed, pointing out her sister's mistake. With a blush, she quickly corrected her gesture into a bow.

"My name is Applejack, my lord," she said in her masculine voice. "This is my sister, Applebloom."

The filly curtsied. "My lord."

"You're not from Illyrimane, are you?" Spike asked abruptly. "Your accents are funny."

Applejack gasped and narrowed her eyes at the Duke. Ponies from outside of Haystings were always poking fun at their dialect, calling it garish and unsophisticated. This dragon seemed to be just as much a snob as the nobleponies.

"Excuse my brother's rudeness," Twilight said, shooting a glare at the dragon. "He is not in his wits today. Based on your accents, I'd say you're from Haystings, am I correct?"

Applejack shared a glance with her sister. "We are, milady."

"You shall have to tell me all about it! I've always longed to travel and I read so much about..."

Spike groaned. "You and your books again." He looked back to the trio. "You say you want to work for me. What can you do?"

Applejack cleared her throat. "My lord, I wish to be a page and my sister is handy with needle and thread. She can also do some housework and whatever task you have for her."

"I do have some dresses that need mending," Twilight noted.

Spike was now speaking directly to the disguised mare. "Can you read and write?"

"Yes, my lord," Applejack responded.

He rubbed his chin. "Do you like music?"

The mare was confused by this, but she nodded.

"What kind?"

"I like whatever music should pique my interest."

The dragon seemed to like this answer, for he smiled.

"Would you say you, uh...have a way with words?"

"It depends on the type of speech I am given."

Spike's smile widened. "Okay, you've got the job."

Applejack blinked suddenly. "Just like that?"

"Just like that. Oh, your sister too, so long as she doesn't disturb me while I'm busy."

"She will not, my lord. I assure you. Applebloom is as well-behaved as any noblemare."

He smirked. "Well, that's a big promise."

"It's true, my lord."

The dragon leapt off the throne and walked toward them. Applejack could now see exactly how short he was. He stood no higher than her chest. It was certainly going to be strange taking orders from a midget. Still, his height made him look all the more adorable.

The Duke took gold out of his purse and handed it to the minotaur.

"Here's for your troubles," he said bluntly. "You may leave now."

Iron Will glanced down at the two sisters and flung his arms around them. The fillies returned his embrace. They had known the captain for many years and he had paid them so much kindness.

"Good luck," he whispered.

The two watched his back until the doors closed on him.

"Caramel!" Spike shouted.

In a few minutes, an orange stallion with slick brown hair came panting into the throne room.

"Yes, your lordship?"

The dragon pointed at the duo. "Take my new page and his sister to the servant's quarters and see that they each get a bed."

"Uh, if it please your lordship," Applejack said, "my sister and I would like our own room."

Spike turned around and raised his eyebrow. "Your own room? What do you think this is? An inn?"

"Beg pardon, my lord. It does not have to be anything fancy. It's just...my sister is nervous around strangers and she'd rather share a room with me."

Applejack nudged her sister with her back hoof. Applebloom got the

message and hugged the older sibling's leg.

"Yes! Please?"

"If I may," Twilight said, "there is an empty room with two beds in the servant's quarters. It's small, but it should be suitable enough."

"It is all I request, my lord," Applejack said, bowing her head.

She so hoped she did not have to share a room with stallions. Suppose some pony walked in while she was undressing?

Spike liked the way this colt spoke: so reasonably, so honestly, yet courteously at the same time. His voice was a little high for a stallion's, but smooth and clear. His visage was pleasant and youthful, his eyes stripped of falseness and filled with persistance. He was just the kind of colt he was looking for.

"Very well."

Applejack looked up in shock. Twilight was equally stunned.

"Do not look so surprised," Spike said with a laugh. "It's a small request which I am happy to fulfill. Caramel, take them to this room." He turned back to Applejack. "Once you two are settled, come back here and we shall discuss your duties."

Applejack noticed the change in the dragon's voice. It was softer and kinder than a few minutes ago. The smile he gave her was warm and friendly. Applejack found herself smiling back.

"Thank you, my lord."

As she watched Caramel lead the siblings away, Twilight looked at her brother curiously. She was about to say something when he interrupted her.

"What do you think of our new servants?"

The unicorn glanced back in the direction the pair had gone. "They both seem well-behaved, even the filly. I hope she is as good with needle and thread as her brother says."

"I'll take his word for it. He appears to be an honest colt."

"Quite handsome, too, though...did he not seem a bit...marish?"

"Don't be rude, Twilight. The appearance of one's face does not account for one's personality. I mean...look at me."

"If appearance does not count, then how do you know he is honest?"

"I can see it in his eyes."

Twilight tilted her head. "Is that why you hired them so quickly?"

"I have my reasons and they are none of your business!" Spike snapped as he sat back on his throne. "Start playing, Octavia."

The unicorn studied the dragon as the music rang from the cello.

"You know something, Spike?"

"What?"

She smirked. "That was the first time I've seen you smile in months."

Not too far from the Duke's manor was the estate of the Lady Rarity. Surrounding the grand house was an apple orchard and walking in that orchard was a yellow pegasus with a flowing pink mane. She was searching the skies furiously.

"Discord!" she cried, holding up an animated hairbrush that was struggling to escape her hoof. "I know you're behind this!"

She heard laughter, but she could not find the source.

"Oh, come on! You have to admit it was funny!"

"Where are you?!" the mare shouted furiously.

Someone tapped her on the shoulder. She spun around to face a tall creature with a gray head of a pony, a long serpentine body covered

in brown fur, a lion's paw, an eagle claw, a bat wing, a blue pegasus wing, a goat leg, a dragon leg, a snake tail, and a deer antler and goat horn on his head. He also had a white goat beard, a long black mane, bushy white eyebrows and yellow eyes with red pupils. Any pony not used to this sort of sight would have been frightened, but this mare did not even flinch.

"You're lucky I'm the one who found this!" she exclaimed, poking the screaming brush into his stomach. "If my lady knew about this, she would banish you from the manor for sure!"

The creature scoffed. "You think my niece would object to a brush that not only styles her mane but compliments on it?"

The mare narrowed her eyes. "She lets you stay here on the condition that you do not cause mischief! Now turn this brush to normal or I will show it to my lady!"

He groaned. "Really, Fluttershy! Have you no sense of humor?"

"Discord..."

"Fine!"

The creature snapped his lion fingers and the brush stopped screaming and was lifeless again.

"Thank you," Fluttershy said. "See that this doesn't happen again."

"Must you suck the fun out of everything?" Discord complained. "I swear, you're getting to be as boring as Cranky Doodle!"

She sighed. "Discord, you promised Lady Rarity that you wouldn't use your magic in this way. You really must break this habit or I'll have to inform your niece..."

"If you were going to tell her, you would have done so already." He smirked. "Why haven't you?"

Fluttershy opened her mouth but could not come up with a proper excuse. She gasped as Discord suddenly grabbed her hoof.

"You know what I think?" he said, wriggling his eyebrows. "It think my charms have had an effect on you."

The pegasus' cheeks flushed red. Then she scowled and wrenched her hoof away.

"I'm serious, Discord," she warned. "You must keep yourself in check! It's bad enough that you pull these little tricks in the house, but if my lady knew of your nightly excursions with those mischievous knights..."

"Who? Sir Soarin and Sir Rainbow Dash?"

"Who do you think? The elaborate pranks the three of you pull always get out of hoof! You could seriously hurt some pony these days!"

"Do they bother you, my dear?"

The mare shook her head. "No. I will admit, I do not mind Sir Rainbow Dash as much, but that Sir Soarin...he is absolutly uncouth! I do not understand why you wish your niece to marry him!"

"He's as tall a stallion as any is in Illyrimane."

Fluttershy raised an eyebrow. "What does his height have to do with anything?"

Discord looked at his paw nonchalantly. "Why, with the height of three thousand bits a year."

The pegasus could not help but giggle, which made the creature grin.

"Aha!" he cried, pointing a finger at her. "See? You *do* have a sense of humor!"

Fluttershy stopped laughing. "The knight might have money, but he's not exactly...bright. I have heard Lady Rarity often say she would prefer a well-educated stallion."

"What? He's got brains."

The mare looked at him wearily.

"He does! I swear!"

"You sure the reason you want him to marry your niece isn't simply that you want your friend to be part of the family?"

Discord scoffed. "What? No! That's silly! Why, Soarin's the perfect match for my niece! You'll see!"

"But why Soarin and not Rainbow Dash?"

"Eh. Dashie's okay, but he can be a real grump sometimes. Plus..." He glanced around and leaned closer to her. "Between you and me, he acts a bit marish sometimes."

"But he is so brave and strong, far worthier a husband than Sir Soarin would ever make."

"Well, if you think he's so *brave* and *strong* ," Discord said with disgust, "why don't *you* marry him?"

Fluttershy blushed. "Oh, I do not think I will marry for a while, not while my mistress is in mourning."

"Why does she have to be so dramatic? So her brother died. So what? Yes, it's sad and all, but she should liven up! As I always say, out with the old..."

The mare gasped as Discord pulled himself inside out, transforming into a baby draconequus.

"In with the new!"

In a flash he was back to normal. Once again, Fluttershy could not contain her giggle.

"Admit it!" he exclaimed. "Admit that you like my jokes!"

She cleared her throat. "They are...amusing."

"Bah! Stop trying to be such a stiff, Fluttershy! Have a little fun once

in a while!"

"Fluttershy!"

They both turned at the sound of a filly's voice. A young white unicorn with a curly pink and purple mane and green eyes was running toward them. She stopped in front of them to catch her breath. Fluttershy smiled and knelt down to the filly.

"What is it, Sweetie Belle?"

The unicorn panted. "My sister...locked...in...room...again."

The pegasus sighed. "Excuse me, Discord. I have to go comfort my lady."

Discord huffed. "Oh, let her continue the theatrics! Maybe she'll get tired and finally give us some peace."

He covered his ears as he heard a loud bawl come from the manor.

"Then again, stop her now, please!"

Fluttershy rolled her eyes. "Must you be so insensitive, Discord?"

He groaned. "Must you be so serious about everything, Fluttershy?"

"It's a serious matter! Don't let me catch you up to your antics again! I promise you, next time, I won't let it slide! Come on, Sweetie."

Discord watched as the mare walked with the filly into the mansion.

"Pretty thing," he admitted under his breath, "but such a killjoy!"

So Spike is older in this story than he is in the show and I know, kind of weird seeing him bossing Twilight around. I guess power can go to one's head (hehe). And he's a bit grumpier. The reason he's Orsino is because he pines for the woman who does not return his affections and plus, I'm just a crazed AppleSpike fan!

Twilight's not based on any character from the play. I was trying to match her up with one and figured she should just be her own character.

Then there's Discord and Fluttershy as Toby and Maria. I realize Fluttershy does not really match Maria's personality, but what I liked about Maria was that despite the things Toby did, she cared for him and tried to get him out of trouble (up to a certain point). It reminded me of Fluttershy's relationship with Discord. Plus, it gives me an excuse to ship Fluttercord again!

Yes, I'm aware that Rainbow Dash is a girl!

Settling In

This took a while and I will be busy the rest of the week.

Their room was more of a closet, containing no furniture but a set of bunks and a single wooden chest. Caramel set the red trunk down and let out an exhausted breath.

"You two are lucky to have a room to yourselves," he said. "I have to share a room with three other stallions! Do you two want a minute alone or shall I take you back upstairs now?"

"Give us a minute," Applejack replied.

Caramel nodded and closed the door behind him. Applejack sighed in relief and fell back on the lower bunk.

"Thank goodness!" she exclaimed. "I was worried they wouldn't buy it!"

"I'd say you convinced 'em that you're a stallion," Applebloom said. "The Duke seemed mighty nice, even if a bit grumpy."

"He was downright rude, that's what he was! He called our accents funny!"

"I'm sure he didn't mean it like that. At least the lady was nice."

Applejack smirked in agreement. "She seems to have more sense than her brother."

"I wish ya hadn't told them I could do housework though. Get real, Applejacqueline! I've never picked up a washcloth in my life!"

"It's not too hard, sister. Besides, you're a filly. I'm sure they'll go easy on ya. And quit calling me Applejacqueline! I'm a boy now, remember?"

"Sorry, sister. I forgot for a moment."

"Brother! I'm yerr *brother* !"

Applebloom groaned. "Sorry! You've been my sister all my life! Ya can't expect me to get used to ya bein' a boy so..."

Applejack covered her sister's mouth. "Keep it down! Ya want all of Illyrimane to hear ya?"

Caramel knocked on the door. "Is everything alright in there?"

The siblings pulled away from each other.

"Yeah!" Applejack called before whispering to her sister. "Look, I'm not comfortable with this lie either, but if any pony finds out who we really are, we could get in trouble. If any pony asks about our past, stick to the story I told ya."

"But what if they ask me somethin' ya didn't tell me?" Applebloom inquired.

"Then make somethin' up, just don't reveal anythin' about my real gender or our station."

"I still feel bad about this."

"It won't be forever, little sis." She knelt down and laid her hooves on the filly. "When the captain returns, we can go home. Just keep quiet, do whatever the Duke Spike and Lady Twilight tell ya and don't lose hope. Understand?"

Applebloom nodded. "I understand, sis...I mean...brother."

When the siblings returned to the throne room, the Duke was lying across his seat, his claw to his forehead, his eyes closed. A gray mare with a black mane was playing a sad tune on her cello. Lady Twilight was standing beside him, rolling her eyes at his behavior. Then she noticed Caramel and the new servants.

"Oh, you're back already!" she exclaimed.

Spike opened his eyes and looked over at the pair. "What took you so long?"

The unicorn nudged his head, gesturing for him to sit up. He grudgingly did so and turned to the servants.

"Caramel, you may leave now," Spike ordered.

The stallion bowed and exited the room. Octavia, thinking the Duke would be more focused on the new servants, ceased her playing. However, this was not what the dragon wanted.

"Don't stop!" he bellowed. "Keep playing!"

Octavia sighed and obeyed her master.

"So anyway," Spike said, addressing Applebloom, "my sister and I have decided that you will work in the kitchen and help our chef, Gustav le Grand, as well as attend Twilight whenever she calls for you. She'll give you the details."

Twilight approached the filly. She frowned when she finally noticed her tattered gown.

"Is that the only dress you have?" she could not help but ask.

Applebloom hung her head. "I'm afraid so, ma'am."

"Well, I have some old curtains and sewing materials you can use to make a dress. Come, I'll show you."

The filly was excited at the thought of getting a new dress and was about to follow the unicorn when she paused to look back at her sister.

"Be good," Applejack mouthed.

Applebloom nodded and ran to catch up with Twilight. Spike jumped off his throne and started walking towards the disguised mare.

"As for you, Applesauce..."

"Applejack," she quickly corrected.

"Yeah, yeah," he said, waving his claw dismissively. "As I was saying, your duties are simple, but you must stick to them. I don't like it when ponies are lazy. You must be at my beck and call every second of every day. I might ask you to fetch me something or to deliver a letter. When you are not running errands for me, I expect you to be sharing cleaning duties with the other servants. I have no housekeeper, you see. Mares are a pain to keep."

Octavia stopped playing for a moment to clear her throat, while Applejack resisted the urge to stomp her hoof and protest. She took a deep breath and calmed her frustration.

"I understand, my lord."

"Good," Spike said bluntly. He turned to Octavia. "Who told you to stop playing?"

"Apologies, my lord," the musician grunted. "I was distracted."

"Well, don't let it happen again!" He whispered to Applejack. "It's so hard to find good musicians these days. I mean the best I could find was a female!"

The disguised mare's face grew hot with anger. She did not know how much longer she could take his sexist comments.

Spike sat back on his throne and gestured to the space beside him. "Sit down."

After taking another deep breath, Applejack took a seat on the floor next to the Duke. The dragon leaned his head on his claw as he listened to Octavia's cello. Applejack waited patiently for him to give her another order or at least say something. The silence was awkward, despite the music playing.

"How do you like this song?" Spike asked abruptly.

It took her a second to realize he was genuinely asking for her

opinion. She did not expect a noble like him to do such a thing.

"Oh, uh..." she stammered.

She took a moment to listen to the tune herself.

"Personally, I think it's quite depressin'. It makes me think of..." She paused. "Some pony I lost."

Spike nodded in understanding. He flipped onto his belly and leaned his head on his fists.

"Apple John..."

"Applejack."

"Right. Applejack, have you ever been in love?"

The mare blinked in confusion. That question had come out of nowhere.

"No, my lord," she admitted. "I've never had the fortune to..."

Spike scoffed. "Fortune, indeed! Let me tell you something, Apple Pie..."

"Applejack."

"Whatever! Let me tell you something! Love stinks! Oh, it's wonderful at first, until the lady rips your heart out, throws it on the ground in front of you and dances on it!"

She grimaced at the image that came to mind. Octavia's playing slowed down for a second as she heard the Duke's passionate statement. The dragon slumped in his seat, his tiny arms crossed. Applejack saw a tear fall from his eye and for the first time, felt pity for him.

"I reckon there's a mare involved here?"

She already knew the answer, but she learnt from her brother that the best way for one to ease pain is to talk about it. Spike looked at

his page and nodded.

"Is she pretty?" she asked with a smirk.

"She's beautiful!" the dragon breathed. "The moment I saw her, her pure white fur, her gorgeously styled mane and her sapphire blue eyes, I was turned into a lovesick school pony. Even her name is beautiful. Rarity!" He sighed dreamily. "Oh, it's like the sound of diamonds delicately falling one by one into a crystal bowl."

He then furrowed his brow angrily. "But she couldn't care less about it! I tell her I love her, I send her gifts, and she still rejects me!"

"Have ya tried flowers?" Applejack suggested.

"That was the first thing I tried! Then I tried poems, jewels...and let me tell you, those were not easy to give away!"

"I've heard of this Lady Rarity and that her brother died recently."

"Yes! Now she refuses all my messengers, telling them that for seven years, in honor of her brother, she will walk around with a veil, refuse any male from seeing her face, dress in black and will not admit any kind of suit."

"Wow," Applejack uttered in surprise. "That sounds...dramatic."

She, herself, was upset with her own brother's death, but she knew Big Macintosh would not want her to stay sad forever. If anything, she would prefer the company of others. That way, she would not feel alone.

"If I may speak freely, my lord," she said carefully, "wouldn't it be best to court a mare more...available?"

"What?!" Spike shouted. "And betray my love for Rarity?!"

"But my lord, from the way you describe her, I'd say the lady is...uninterested. After all, she is more concerned with her brother's death than..."

"Don't you see? This vigil of hers makes her all the more desirable!"

Applejack blinked. "Ya lost me, sir."

"If she can have this much love for her brother, imagine how much love she'll give her husband!"

"Good grief," the mare said under her breath.

Applejack never really considered herself a romantic, though she preferred to choose her own husband. After watching the dragon, she did not plan on becoming romantic any time soon. If this was what happened to romantics, she figured it was not worth it.

"Enough!" Spike said suddenly and Octavia stopped. "It's not so sweet now as it was before. You can take a break now, Miss Octavia."

"Finally!" the mare breathed.

The Duke jumped off his throne. "You know what I feel like? A walk in the garden! Why don't you join me, Apple Core? I'll give you a tour of the castle grounds."

The orange mare gritted her teeth as she followed him. "It's Applejack!"

"What do you think of our garden?" Spike inquired.

Truthfully, Applejack thought it was quite impressive. There were flowers of many kinds: roses, buttercups, violets, lilies, tulips and more.

"Very well tended," she said in awe.

"I'm sorry there are no apple trees," he said with a shrug. "I hear Haystings grows the best apples in the world, am I right?"

Applejack smiled at the memory of the orchard back home. "You'd be right, my lord."

"That explains your name." He rubbed the back of his neck

awkwardly. "Speaking of which, sorry I didn't get your name right a few times. It's nothing personal. I'm just bad with names."

The mare shrugged. "Well, what's in a name? That which we call an apple by any other name would taste as sweet."

Spike stopped and turned to her with a smirk. "You weren't kidding when you said you had a way with words."

She did not know why, but she found herself blushing. It was strange, for this was not something she often did.

"That's why I hired you," the dragon continued. "I have a job to be done and I think you're the colt to do it."

"What kind of job, sir?" Applejack asked.

"I'll tell you later."

He walked a few steps and leaned forward to sniff a rose.

"Ah," he sighed. "So lovely!" His face fell. "Just like her."

Applejack shook her head. She hoped the captain would hurry back soon. She was not sure how much more of this nonsense she could take.

Iron Will searched the town for a stable, or at least a cart that would take him to Haystings. Perhaps if they had traveled by land before, though it would have taken longer, they would not be in this mess.

The minotaur did not look where he was going and bumped into someone. He fell backward into a melon cart, bursting a melon open and squirting juice onto the shirt of the pony he had collided into. He looked up and saw that it was not a pony, but a well-dressed, very cross donkey with a head of black hair. He glared at the minotaur.

"You...you..."

"Iron Will apologizes, sir!" the captain said as he rose. "Iron Will was

not watching where...

"YOU'VE RUINED MY SUIT, YOU IDIOT!"

The minotaur scowled. He did not like it when others yelled at him.

"Excuse me, sir!" he shouted. "But perhaps *you* should watch where *you're* going! You do not want to make Iron Will angry!"

The donkey gasped. "Are you threatening me?"

"What if I am?"

"Guards!"

Two unicorn officers rushed to the donkey's aid. He pointed accusingly at Iron Will.

"This...this...monster attacked me!"

The minotaur blinked. "What? But I..."

"Arrest him at once!"

Iron Will held out his hands in protest, only to have a pair of metal cuffs slapped onto his wrists.

"Come along quietly, sir," one of the guards said, "and you will not be harmed."

"But Iron Will is innocent!" the minotaur cried as the soldiers took him by the arms.

He ripped himself out of their grasp, but the unicorns used their magic to trap him in a bubble. Iron Will was paralyzed, but he could still think. He was thinking about Applejacqueline and Applebloom and how they were going to get home now.

"Do you like it?" Applebloom asked as she twirled around, showing off her new dress.

"It's nice," Applejack said indifferently.

"The Lady Twilight said she's goin' to bring me new fabrics so I can make more gowns! She's *so* nice! She showed me the whole manor! Oh, have you seen the library? It's huge!"

"I've seen it."

"And did you know the chef is a griffin? Do ya know what a griffin is? He's half eagle, half lion! He's Prench, too!"

"That's nice."

"Then Lady Twilight showed me her dresses." She stuck out her tongue. "Not only do they need a good mendin' but a head to hoof makeover! She may be nice, but she has poor taste in fashion. So how was the Duke?"

Applejack groaned and fell back on her cot. "He's unbelievable! He wouldn't stop talkin' about that mare! Rarity this! Rarity that! Rarity's so pretty! Not only is he a nervous wreck, but he's so rude! All those things he said about mares! He's no better than Prince Blueblood!"

"Oh, come on," Applebloom said. "I'm sure he's not *that* bad."

"You weren't there! Ugh! That dragon is a snob just like all the other nobles! I don't see why he wants me anyway. All I did was follow him around all day and listen to him jabber on and on about how miserable he is! What does he take me for? A psychiatrist?"

The filly was about to respond when some pony knocked on the door. Lady Twilight's voice was heard.

"May I come in?"

Applejack climbed down and straightened her jacket. "Of course, milady."

The unicorn entered, carrying a stack of cloth with her magic.

"I found some fabrics for you, Applebloom," she said. "I hope they will do."

Applebloom's amber eyes glinted with excitement as she took the material in her hooves.

"Thank you, milady!"

The unicorn giggled. "Oh please, sweetie. You can call me Twilight."

"Okay, Twilight!" The filly set the fabrics down on her bed and examined them. "Gee, where can I start?"

Applejack smiled at her sister and turned to Twilight. "This was very kind of ya, milady, but you didn't have to bring these down yourself."

"Oh, I don't mind," the unicorn said with a shrug. "You're probably wondering why we have no housekeeper or maids. Well, housework relaxes me, so I prefer to do it on my own."

The disguised mare nodded. "That's a practical hobby, not something you'd expect from a lady of the court."

Twilight rolled her eyes. "It's just a stupid title. It doesn't mean anything. Spike is the one with power."

"Why'd your father make him heir and not you, milady?"

"Society expects a male heir." The unicorn chuckled. "You think I'm jealous, don't you? Well, I suppose it's a little strange that Father gave the title to his adopted child and not his blood child, but honestly, I don't mind. I'm not really interested in politics anyway."

"I'd think you'd make an excellent ruler, milady."

Twilight blushed. "Thank you. Hey, I wanted to tell you that I'm really glad you two showed up here. I'm amazed at how much my brother favors you after only knowing you for a day!"

Applejack scrunched her nose. "Favors me?"

"Of course! Didn't you see him smiling today? He hasn't smiled in months! And I saw him giving you a tour of the manor. He *never* does that for any pony! Don't forget he gave you two a room to yourselves! Why, he hasn't been that generous since... What else

did you two do?"

The disguised mare shrugged. "I don't know. He just had me follow him around, talked about the Lady Rarity, asked me what I thought of the music and the garden..."

"He asked you for your opinion?! He never asks *any* pony for their opinion! He never even asks *me* for my opinion! He doesn't listen to any pony else's opinion unless it matches his own!"

She stared at Applejack in awe. "How do you do it?"

Applejack could not respond, for she was trying to process the lady's words. Did the Duke really favor her? Despite his arrogance, had he been giving her special treatment all this time?

"Well," Twilight said, "you've certainly made a change in him. You know, he may seem thick-skinned, but he has a good heart. I hope you'll stay with us long. We're going to be good friends, you and I!"

Applejack could not help but smile. She had never had a female friend her age before. The maids back home were either too old or too young and all the noblemares who came to visit were either too snooty or wanted nothing to do with her. She wanted to get better acquainted with the unicorn, but then remembered she was supposed to be a stallion and should be careful. She did not want Twilight or any pony to get the wrong impression.

"I look forward to servin' ya, milady," Applejack replied.

"Please," the unicorn said. "Call me Twilight. 'Milady' makes me feel so old!"

The two mares giggled. Applejack then realized how shrill her laughter was and coughed deeply to cover it up.

"Well, I must be off," Twilight said. "It's getting late and I want to finish that chapter of *Magical Myths and Legends* before bed. Goodnight, Applejack! Goodnight, Applebloom!"

"Goodnight!" the siblings said in unison.

Once the lady was gone, Applejack turned to her sister. "You're right. She is nice."

"Told ya!" Applebloom exclaimed. "Wow, Applejacqueli...err, Applejack! Only a day at work and you're already in the Duke's favor!"

"Yeah," Applejack uttered.

"And he's really not that bad. I'm sure you'll like him better once ya get to know him."

"Sure."

The filly looked at her slyly. "He's kinda cute too."

The mare blushed a deep red. She then laughed and playfully nudged her sister.

"Oh, you little whipper-snapper! The very idea!"

"Why not?" Applebloom inquired.

"First of all, hon, he's our master. Our relationship must remain professional. Second, I'm supposed to be a stallion, remember? Third, ya know he's in love with some pony else."

The filly shrugged. "Hey, I was just teasin'."

"Well, don't."

As Applejack flopped down on her bed, she muttered to herself. "Me and the Duke...of all the..."

She then thought of Spike's adorable eyes, his adorable face and his adorable smile and could not help but blush.

At first, he could only see shapes. Then his vision came into focus and he saw a straw ceiling.

"Oh, thank Celestia!" said a female voice. "I nearly thought you

dead!"

The stallion turned his head to see a blue unicorn maiden with platinum hair sitting in a chair beside him. A wide grin was upon her face, her violet eyes shining with joy.

"Who are ya?" he uttered, attempting to rise. "Where am I?" He stopped and clutched his head. "Why does my head hurt?" Then he looked down and realized that his fur had changed color. "And why am I orange?"

"Take it easy!" the mare urged, trying to get him to lie back down. "You had a nasty blow to the head. I tried to use a healing spell on you, but..." She blushed with embarrassment. "It instead turned your coat a lighter hue. The effects should wear off...eventually."

"But how did I get here? And who are you?"

The mare's smile faded and she hesitated in answering. "My...name is...is...Trixie. Trixie Lulamoon. You're in my cottage, just outside Illyrimane. You were lying on the beach and I brought you here."

She remembered how she had found him nearly dead. His brilliant emerald-green eyes had opened for a moment and locked with hers before closing again. She blushed at the memory of how in the process of feeling his pulse, she had felt his strong muscles.

"Illyrimane?" the stallion said. "The beach?"

He rubbed his head. He rememberd now. There was a storm, his little sister had fallen in the water, he had rushed to save her, he had placed her on a raft, the ship had exploded, he found his other sister and pushed her onto the wood and then...everything went black.

He gasped and sat up. "My sisters! Where are my sisters?!"

"Your...sisters?"

"Where are they?!"

The unicorn looked at him sadly. "You...you were the only one I found. I...I didn't see others."

Tears formed in the stallion's eyes. "Then they are drowned." He buried his face in his hooves. "Oh, sweet Applejacqueline! Dear little Applebloom!"

Trixie sympathetically put her hoof on his shoulder. "I am sorry. I lost my family as well. But cheer up. At least you survived."

The stallion raised his eyes to meet the mare's and sighed. "You shouldn't have saved me. If you had not, I would have died with my sisters! We could've been together!"

The unicorn shook her head. "Tsk, tsk. That's no way to talk! If your sisters were here, I'm sure they'd want you to live instead of sulk. Now lie down. I'll make you some soup."

The stallion nodded to her. "Thank you, madam."

Trixie smiled, her cheeks blushing again. "What's your name, sir?"

Like her, he hesitated in answering. "Big Mac. My name is Big Mac."

Yes, Big Macintosh is alive and I had to make him orange somehow. I'm not a TrixieMac fan. I just thought Trixie would fit the part of Antonio, since she is a (SPOILER ALERT!) reformed criminal in exile (she fits the bill anyway).

One of the few things that bugged me about the play was that it never explained why Viola was in love with Orsino, so I decided to expand AJ and Spike's relationship here. Also, it said that the captain was in prison for some reason but it was never explained. My goal is to fill in all the plot holes Shakespeare created.

We're All Fools Here

I'm going to try to update at least once every week.

"So how are you and the Duke gettin' along?" Applebloom asked her sister as they scrubbed the dishes.

Applejack shrugged. "Not as bad as I figured. I guess you and Twilight were right about me bein' in his favor. Caramel and Time Turner have been givin' me funny looks."

"Funny as in humor or funny as in strange?"

"Funny as in I think they're angry with me."

"They're just jealous. After all, I don't see the Duke callin' on them as often. They also don't get invited to dine with him like you do. I heard 'em whisperin' at lunch yesterday that he might promote ya to advisor!"

"We've only been here a week, Sugar."

"Exactly! That's why they're so jealous! Take Time Turner, for example. He's been workin' here for ten years and hasn't gotten as far as you have! How come you're so special?"

"Beats me. I didn't really do anything to impress him. He did say he liked the way I talked, whatever that means."

"Well, Miss Octavia said she's glad he's got some pony else to rant to. I think that's a good thing."

"How ya holdin' up with the work?"

"It was hard at first. The first day, Gustav yelled at me for droppin' so many plates, but I think I got the hang of it. Twilight is the best mistress ever! Actually, she feels more like a big sister than a mistress! Oh, no offense."

"It's okay, hon. I'm glad you're doin' fine."

They heard the sound of some pony clearing his throat and turned to see Time Turner standing in the kitchen doorway.

"The Duke would like Applejack to meet him in his study," he said in a monotone.

Applejack put down the plate she was washing. "I'll see ya at dinner, sis."

"If he doesn't invite ya tonight," Applebloom whispered with a wink.

The mare ruffled her sister's mane. On her way out, she felt Time Turner's glaring eyes follow her. She felt uncomfortable being the center of envy amongst the servants. It was not something she intended to do.

Another part of her did not mind being the Duke's favorite. Since started getting name right, she disliked him a lot less. In fact, she felt more pity than disdain towards him. Watching him pine for the Lady Rarity every day made her almost wish the unicorn would accept his affections. Applejack wondered what this mare was like. She must be quite pretty for him to get so worked up about.

Applejack was rather enjoying Spike's company. He made sure their conversations were not one-sided and always demanded that she speak freely. When Blueblood was courting her, he would continuously talk about one thing: himself. While the Duke would talk about himself and Lady Rarity often, he would also ask Applejack about herself. She had told him that she and Applebloom were orphaned when she was thirteen and that Captain Iron Will had taken care of them, which was true to some extent. All her stories were like this where she would never give any incriminating details. The Duke would also ask for her opinion on music and philosophy. She did not think her answers were that intelligent, but he always seemed pleased with what she had to say.

The door to the Duke's study was open. The dragon was sitting on a high chair at his desk, holding a piece of parchment in his claw.

"You wished to see me, my lord?"

Spike turned around and smiled at the sight of her. "Ah, Applejack! Excellent! I need your opinion again." He held out the parchment. "Read this and tell me what you think."

Curious, Applejack took the paper in her hoof and started to read: *Most radiant, exquisite...*

"Read it aloud," Spike said quickly. "I want to hear how it sounds."

The mare nodded and started again, this time speaking the words on the paper:

" *Most radiant, exquisite and unmatchable beauty, the fairest of the fair, the diamond of mine eye...* "

Applejack paused to raise an eyebrow at the Duke. "My lord, what is this?"

"It's for the Lady Rarity," Spike explained. "Keep reading!"

She sighed and continued.

" *I write to thee so that thou may knowest my heart. I love thee with a burning passion, with flames that scorch my fireproof skin...* "

She trailed off, her bemused face melting away.

"Continue," Spike urged."

Applejack composed herself and obeyed her master's command.

" *When mine eyes did see thee first, methought thou purged the air of pestilence. That instant did I see perfection. Thine eyes shine like sapphires on a moonlit night. Thy mane like the delicate petals of violets. Thy ivory coat envies the pure, newly fallen snow. I...I feel I shall not know happiness until thy heart is mine as mine is thine. Your humble servant, the Duke of Illyrimane* ."

Applejack was quiet for a long while. Spike took her silence as disappointment. Was the letter truly horrible?

"Well?" he begged.

"My lord," she uttered, her voice slipping into its female origin. "This...this is...beautiful."

His eyes lit up with joy. "Really?"

She came back to her senses and cleared her throat. "It's...very passionate, my lord. You seem to have expressed your emotions quite excellently. Although...the beginning could be revised."

"You think so? What would you suggest?"

"I think you should limit the praises in the first sentence to one."

"Oh? Which do you like best?"

She tapped her chin. "I think the "unmatchable beauty" statement is best. It's more original."

"Yes, of course!" Spike snatched back the parchment and scribbled his quill on it. "Oh, you may go now. I think the West Corridor needs mopping."

"I'll get right on it, my lord."

Applejack bowed before departing. On her way to the West Corridor, she passed by a supply closet and figured she would need a mop. She was about to turn the knob when she heard voices inside. They were low, but she could distinguish two of them at least and one of them was female.

She had to make sure no pony was in trouble and flung the door open. She stiffened at the sight of two ponies embracing each other, their lips locked in a passionate kiss. The stallion she recognized as one of the guards. Flash Sentry, she thought. The mare she knew all too well.

At the sound of the door opening, the couple pulled away. Lady Twilight's eyes widened to match the size of Applejack's. Twilight glanced between the guard and the page. Applejack glanced between her lady and the guard. After a moment of awkward

silence, Twilight spoke directly to Applejack:

"Do not tell anyone, especially my brother."

Once her shock had diminished, the disguised mare replied, "Tell what, my lady? I just came here to get a mop."

Without pulling from the unicorn's embrace, Flash reached behind him and grabbed the nearest mop for the page. As Applejack took it, she looked at Twilight with a smirk.

"Enjoy yourself, my lady."

The unicorn blushed with a smile. Applejack then shut the door, giving the lovers their privacy.

The next morning, the Duke called desperately for Applejack. When she finally answered his call, he led her into the garden. He said nothing until they reached the gazebo.

"Applejack, I have a very important task for you. This is perhaps the most significant task I will have you fulfill. I hired you because I thought you suited for this affair and I wanted to make certain. Well, now I am certain."

"What is it, my lord?" the disguised mare asked.

The dragon reached into his shirt and pulled out a piece of parchment. "You remember this letter, right? I want you to give it to the Lady Rarity. If she does not like it, tell her of my love in any way you can."

Applejack did not know why, but she felt her heart sink as she took the letter in her hoof.

"I...I am honored, sir, but from how you described her, I don't think she will give me audience."

"Be stubborn, then! Stand at her gate and tell her that you will not leave your spot until she lets you see her."

"Haven't the other messengers done this and were denied?"

"Yes, but they can't speak the way you can."

For a second, she thought he was referring to her accent. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"I mean you speak intelligently and persuasively. If that doesn't get you in, your face will."

She blinked. "My face?"

"Surely Rarity will be attracted to your youthful appearance. Why, she'd almost think you weren't a stallion."

Applejack gulped. "Really?"

"I mean no offense, but your face and voice are a bit marish. Of course, we can't control these things. Anyway, she is sure to find you appealing enough that she'll listen to you."

"But my lord..."

"I wouldn't have chosen you for this task if I thought you couldn't do it. Just in case she doesn't let you in, bring your sister along. Mares find it hard to resist little foals."

"But I don't even know the way..."

"Have Caramel and Time Turner show you the way. Take a couple of others with you too. With an entourage, you'll look like some pony important. Read her the letter and if that doesn't work, say whatever you can to impress her."

He took her hoof and locked eyes with her. "I know you have not worked for me for long, but I don't think I can trust any pony else with this."

Applejack sighed. "I'll do my best to woo your lady."

Spike smiled. "I know you will. Well, what are you waiting for? Get going!"

She bowed and turned to go inside. As she walked away from the dragon, she felt a stirring illness in her stomach. The more she thought about the task at hoof, the sicker she became.

What if the lady rejected him again? Would he get worse than he was now? And what if she accepted him? She seemed to dread that question more.

Applejack shook these feelings off. Her master had given her an assignment and it was her duty to fulfill it. He was counting on her to open the door to his happiness, and if her master was happy, she should be happy.

Then why did she feel so horrible?

Discord snickered as he turned all the apples in Lady Rarity's orchard to oranges. His prank did not go unnoticed. Fluttershy, wearing a black gown by order of her lady, flew furiously through the trees, searching for the draconequus. She groaned as the oranges transformed into bananas and then to polka-dotted pineapples. She finally found him rolling on the ground with laughter.

"Just what do you think you're doing?!" she shouted.

He stopped laughing and looked up at the pegasus. Her teal eyes were glaring down at him. Her hooves were on her hips. He could not help but grin.

"You know you look kind of cute when you're angry?"

She narrowed her eyes. "If you think Lady Rarity won't notice this..."

"What? She can't see anything through that veil of hers!"

"I can't believe you! If it hadn't been for your niece, you would be a lawn ornament in the Canterlot Gardens! She persuaded Princess Celestia to spare your life and this is how you repay her?! Do you *want* to be turned to stone?!"

"Well, when you put it *that* way..."

He grudgingly snapped his fingers and returned the orchard to normal.

"Honestly, Fluttershy! Can't you allow me to have a *little* fun?"

"Not when it can cost you your life!"

Discord put his paw to his chest. "Awwwww! You care about me! But seriously, a few teeny tiny pranks never hurt any pony!"

Fluttershy took his paw and looked seriously into his eyes. "It could hurt *you* ."

He pulled his paw away. "Appreciate the concern, but I can take care of myself. You don't need to worry."

"I'll stop worrying if you stop acting like a child!"

"And what's wrong with that? We were all children once, weren't we? We all grow old, but some of us never grow up!"

His ears perked up as he heard merry music. He turned and saw an oddly shaped figure enter the orchard. He squinted and smiled at what he saw.

"See what I mean? Now *here's* a mare who knows how to have fun!"

The pony was pink with a poofy, darker pink mane and icy blue eyes. She wore a purple and yellow patchwork leotard with a matching jester's cowl. Wrapped around her body was a sousaphone with a tambourine tied to it and hanging from her neck was a banjo and harmonica. Attached to her side was an accordion, behind it a bass drum, two cymbals tied to each of her front legs. As she walked, the instruments shook and rattled, together making a grand cacophony. A baton pounded on the drum it was tied to with every step the mare took. Her mouth alternated between blowing into the sousaphone and the harmonica.

She approached the pair and stopped in front of them, but continued playing. Discord summoned a movie seat and a bag of popcorn. Fluttershy simply shook her head.

The mare finished her song with a long blow of the sousaphone and bowed to her audience. Discord applauded, his paw and claw making a different sound with each clap.

"Bravo, Madam Pinkie!" he exclaimed. "Encore! Encore!"

"You want an encore?" the pink mare asked.

She took off her jingling hat and held it out to him. "It's going to cost ya."

"But of course!" Discord said, making a coin appear in his claw. "You well deserve this!"

With a flick of his talons, the coin dropped into the mare's hat. She picked it up and looked at it suspiciously.

"I wasn't born yesterday, Discord," she said. "No, sir! My birthday's not for another eighty-seven days!"

"Whatever do you mean?" the draconequus asked innocently.

She showed him the picture of himself on the coin. "This is foal's gold!"

He held up his claw and paw. "Alright, you caught me!"

Discord waved his paw and wiped his face off the coin. Pinkie bit into the gold and smiled in satisfaction.

"Okay! You're in the clear!" She pointed her hat at the pegasus. "Any tips from you, Flutters?"

"You're late," Fluttershy said bluntly.

Pinkie shrugged as she put her hat back on. "I was stuck in a traffic jam. It took me forever to wash that sticky stuff out of my pants!"

"This is no time for jokes! Lady Rarity doesn't like it when you're late!"

"So what if I'm late? What's she gonna do? Chop off my head? Beat

me in a game of croquet? Dress me in a bunny suit and waistcoat?"

"What are you even talking about?"

"She'll get over it once I make her smile! That's why she sent for me, right? She needs a smile put on her face and putting on smiles is what I do best! I even wrote a song about it! You wanna hear it?"

They all paused when they heard a familiar whine.

"Some other time, Pinkie," Fluttershy said. "Here comes my lady. You should come up with a better excuse than jam in your pants."

The jester rubbed her chin. "That my dog ate my homework?"

"That...what does that even mean?!"

"Well," Discord said, "as much as I'd love to stay and watch the show, I have some business across town!"

He cried out as Fluttershy grabbed his ear.

"Oh, no you don't, mister!" she snapped. "We're going to have a long talk about your chaotic behavior!"

"Pinkie, help me!" Discord shouted as the pegasus dragged him away.

The fool did nothing but wave. "You kids have fun!"

She then looked to her side and whispered to the empty void. "They're in love!"

The Lady Rarity appeared with her entourage. She was dressed in a dark gown, her face hidden by a black veil. As she walked, she wept loudly, one hoof clinging to her donkey companion, who watched her sympathetically. On her other side was her sister Sweetie Belle, whose ensemble matched hers. Two guards marched obediently behind them.

Sweetie Belle yelped as she tripped over a rock. Rarity stopped crying for a moment to scold her.

"Watch where you step, Sweetie Belle!"

"I can't help it, sister!" the filly exclaimed, lifting her veil. "It's hard to see through this thing! Do we have to do this every day?"

"Indeed we must, little sister," Rarity said solemnly. "It is the only way we can pay respect to our dearly departed brother."

Sweetie Belle groaned. "But it's *so* boring!"

"Sweetie Belle! Is that any way to honor your brother's death?"

"But the funeral was a month ago! I miss him too, sis, but is this what Fancy Pants would have wanted us to do?"

"Enough!"

"But it's such a beautiful day! Can't we play hide-and-seek or catch frogs?"

"No, sister! We cannot want for idleness when our brother is dead!"

"Fancy would have played with me," Sweetie Belle grumbled under her breath.

"Did I hear some pony say 'play?'"

The filly lit up in excitement at the sound of Pinkie Pie's voice. The one-mare-band jumped in the entourage's path.

"Cuz Pinkie Pie is here to play! I will cheer you up and brighten up your day!"

She blew hard into her sousaphone, only to be silenced by Rarity:

"No, Pinkie! I have no interest in such folly today." She turned to the guards. "Take the fool away."

The two stallions nodded and approached the pink mare. She raised an eyebrow at them.

"Didn't you hear her?" she asked, pointing at the unicorn. "Take her away!"

Sweetie Belle snickered. Rarity looked at Pinkie curiously through her veil.

"Are you calling me a fool, madam?"

"Well, you said take away the fool," Pinkie replied, "and the fooliest fool I see around here is you."

"How dare you?!" the donkey bellowed.

"Easy, Cranky," Rarity said before turning to the jester again. "What is your reason behind this insult?"

"Oh, I didn't mean to be rude," Pinkie explained, "I was just speaking the truth."

"If I am such a fool, prove it."

"Okie dokie!"

The pink mare shrugged out of her instruments and approached the lady.

"Tell me, Rarity. Why do you dress in black and cry so much and don't even smile and hide your face like you've got a huge zit and act so sad and make me sad because you're sad? Why is that?"

"My brother died," Rarity replied with sadness.

"Oh yes," Pinkie sighed, looking up at the clouds. "That's right. He's gone to the big castle in the sky." She gasped. "Or has he gone to the other place?!"

"I know he's in Heaven, you fool!" the unicorn insisted angrily.

"Well, isn't it all the more foolish to be sad that your brother's in Heaven?"

Rarity opened her mouth to speak but found no argument. Pinkie looked smugly at the guards and gestured toward the unicorn.

"Take away the fool, boys."

Sweetie Belle burst out laughing and Rarity let out a giggle.

"There we go!" Pinkie exclaimed, lifting the veil from Rarity's face. "There's that smile!"

The unicorn playfully nudged the jester's shoulder. "You always know how to cheer me up, Pinkie."

"Aw, it's no biggie! I also know how to make cupcakes!"

The donkey rolled his eyes. "Why are we wasting time with this fool, my lady? She does nothing but nonsense."

He grunted as the pink mare hopped on his back.

"Come on, Doodle!" she chimed, lifting up the corners of his mouth. "Give a smile here!"

The donkey tugged his face away and tossed the jester off his back. She landed on the ground with a thud.

"No pony calls me Doodle!" he shouted.

"Oh, do lighten up, Cranky!" Rarity said as she helped Pinkie off the ground. "There's no harm in taking pleasure in ridiculousness every now and then."

"But my lady, you're in mourning..."

"And now my vigil is done for the day. Let's go inside, Pinkie. Come along, Sweetie Belle."

Sweetie Belle smiled and followed the mares excitedly.

"Hey, Pinkie! Can you do that thing with your face? Oh, oh! Or pull a platypus out of your hat?"

"How about I give you a platypus of your own?" Pinkie suggested.

"Really?"

The jester pulled a long balloon out of her suit and blew it up in one breath. Then she twisted it several ways into the shape of a

platypus. She presented it to the unicorn filly.

"Oh, I thought you meant...never mind."

"You know?" Pinkie said to the lady. "I'm surprised at you, Rarity."

"Whatever do you mean?" Rarity asked as they walked through the doors of the mansion.

"I heard you say that for seven years you would hide your face from every pony and mourn day and night and yet you're not wearing your veil right now and you're laughing at my jokes!" She stuck her nose in the unicorn's face. "What are you really hiding, huh?"

"Pinkie!" Rarity exclaimed, slapping the mare away. "Personal space!"

"Well? Why are you really being a dramatic drama queen?"

The unicorn stopped and turned to her sister. "Sweetie Belle, would you leave us be?"

The filly nodded and left the two mares in the study. Rarity shut the doors and turned to her friend with an exasperated sigh.

"Alright, you caught me," she admitted. "You see, I'm using my brother's death as an excuse to turn away suitors. The Duke Spike won't leave me alone and that friend of my uncle's really makes me uncomfortable! If they think I'm in mourning, they won't question my motives."

"Aha!" Pinkie cried. "I knew it!"

Rarity hung her head. "I truly miss my brother though."

The jester smiled sympathetically and placed her hoof on the unicorn's shoulder. "I know."

Rarity grinned in return and embraced her friend as she wept.

I could think of no pony better than Pinkie to play the Fool! And Cranky, though he doesn't act like a big-shot, is the killjoy I had in mind for Malvolio. Again, these ponies are merged with the characters from the play, so they are slightly different, especially in their speech.

Accidentally in Love

Once again, I've filled in a few blanks, but I'll confess I've used a lot of lines in the play for this chapter, but made them more understandable.

Discord struggled in Fluttershy's grasp. She was a small mare but had a strong grip. While he could really teleport away from her at any time, he secretly liked being her hostage. Her hostility towards him was extremely attractive, and he could not deny that she was pretty.

He did not tell Fluttershy any of this, for that would spoil the fun of catching her off guard with his flirting. Besides, he did not think it a serious attraction. He was not a creature to be tied down by something as petty as love. Still, there was no harm in a little teasing every now and then.

She finally released her hold of him. Discord caressed his sore ear.

"Must you pull so hard?" he snapped.

Fluttershy sighed. "What am I going to do with you, Discord?"

He shrugged. "We're both single. You could always marry me."

"This is no joking matter, Discord! What if it was some pony else who had caught you, like Cranky? Would he have treated the matter so lightly?"

He gulped. "If that's what you call 'lightly,' I think I'd pass, but I hope you realize if it was Cranky who caught me, I would have just turned him into an orange."

Fluttershy crossed her forelegs. "And if my lady questions his whereabouts?"

"We'll say he went on vacation, or quit. Ooh, I like that second idea better!"

"Why, Discord? Why must it always be chaos with you?"

"Uh, *hello* ?" He knocked himself on the head. "Spirit of Chaos and Disharmony, remember?"

She groaned. "You know? Sometimes I wonder why your niece even bothered saving you!"

His face fell with genuine disappointment. "You don't really mean that, do you?"

Fluttershy immediately felt guilty at her outburst. She had not meant to hurt him, nor did she truly hate him. She was just fed up with all the chaos he had been creating.

"Discord, I...I..."

She trailed off as she heard some pony clear his throat. The couple turned to see a group of ponies standing at the gate. The pony that had made himself known was a young colt with orange fur and a blond mane. Beside him stood a red-headed filly and behind them were four other stallions.

Fluttershy darted her eyes at Discord. "We'll finish this later."

She flew over to the group of visitors.

"Is this the house of the Lady Rarity?" the young colt asked in a shrill voice.

"It is," Fluttershy replied bluntly. "What business do you have here?"

The colt took an envelope from his coat pocket. "I have a message for the Lady Rarity."

"Oh? From whom?"

"That information I am to give only to the Lady Rarity herself."

Fluttershy figured this colt was another page of the Duke Spike's and knew her lady would not allow him to be admitted.

"I'm afraid my lady is not seeing any pony today, on account of her brother's death."

"Yes," the colt nodded. "My sincerest condolences, but despite this tragedy, I must speak with the lady. My orders..."

"Tell your master that your orders cannot be fulfilled and that he should pay court elsewhere!"

A small voice spoke: "Could you please let us in?"

Fluttershy looked down at the filly. Her lip was curled in a pout and her amber eyes were wide and teary. The pegasus felt her heart swell at the sweet filly's expression.

"Oh," she uttered. "Well, I suppose..."

"Fluttershy!"

The pagecolt and filly yelped as Discord appeared at Fluttershy's side.

"How many times have I told you, my dear? You've got to be more assertive with these kinds of ponies!"

He then took the time to notice the visitors. The filly was hiding behind the young colt's leg, shaking with fear. He smiled brightly.

"Well, hello there, little one!" he exclaimed, stooping down to the foal's level. "And what's your name?"

The filly was too stunned to speak.

"Who are you?" the colt managed to ask.

"Oh, so sorry!" Discord said. "How rude of me!" He bowed politely. "I am Discord, Lord of Chaos!"

"He's my lady's uncle," Fluttershy quickly explained.

The pagecolt's eyes widened. " *You're* related to the Lady Rarity?!"

"Well," Discord cringed, "sort of. See, I'm really a thousand or so years old, so technically I'm her great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-gr eat-great-great-great uncle...twice removed."

The colt blinked. "Uh-huh."

The draconequus knelt down to the filly again. "Would you like some candy, little one?"

The filly poked out her head cautiously. "What kind of candy?"

He snapped his fingers and a cone holding a fluffy pink substance appeared in the filly's yellow hoof. She gazed at it in amazement.

"Neat, huh?" Discord said. "I call it 'cotton candy,' an invention of my own. Try it!"

The filly looked to the colt who nodded with permission. She carefully took a bite of the treat and chewed. She moaned in delight chomping down again.

"This is delicious!" she said with her mouth full.

The colt smiled before turning to the pegasus. "Now, about your lady..."

"She is not seeing any pony today," Fluttershy repeated. "So I suggest you be on your way or..."

"What?" Discord gasped. "But we were just getting started!"

He reached his claw through the bars and behind the filly's ear. "What's this?"

The filly gasped as he pulled out a beautiful china pony doll and placed it in her hooves.

"That's incredible!" she exclaimed.

"Oh," Discord smirked. "You ain't seen nothing yet!"

"Discord!" Fluttershy whispered harshly. "These ponies have to leave, or we'll have to tell your niece about this!"

" *You* tell her! I'm just getting warmed up here!"

He snapped her away before she could protest.

"Discord!" Fluttershy shouted.

She paused when she realized she had been transported to the study. Rarity and Pinkie turned to her in surprise.

"Fluttershy?" the unicorn said. "How did...?"

The pegasus shook her head furiously. "Never mind that. Madam, there's a stallion at the gate who wishes to speak with you."

Rarity groaned. "Sent by the Duke Spike, no doubt."

"He did not say, milady. He's a fair young colt, I will tell you. He has four other stallions attending him, as well as a young filly about Sweetie Belle's age."

"A filly?" She sighed. "What will they think of next? He sends a child to woo me! Who's watching them at the gate?"

Fluttershy hesitated. "Your uncle, madam...Discord."

The unicorn gasped. "Get him away from there! The last thing we need is a lawsuit!"

"Right away, milady."

Fluttershy flew hastily out of the room.

"Cranky!" Rarity called.

The donkey was at her side in an instant. "What do you wish of me, my lady?"

"Tell that colt at the gate that I am sick or not at home. Anything to

send him off!"

"Yes, my lady."

Once Cranky was gone, Pinkie spoke: "I get that you're putting on this charade to ward off unwanted suitors and stuff, but what I don't get is why you won't give the Duke a chance. He's rich, he's powerful, he's kind of cute for a dragon..."

"He's not my type," Rarity replied bluntly. "Besides, I have no interest in marriage. After all, I have to deal with my foolish uncle and see that my sister is taken care of."

She sighed and sunk into the couch. "The Duke and I don't really have anything in common. If ever I marry, it would be to a colt with whom I can relate. He wouldn't give any empty promises, but show his love."

"Of course he's got to have a sense of humor," Pinkie added.

"Yes." She smiled softly as she thought of her dream stallion. "He would be good to my sister and be willing to put up with my uncle. He would respect my opinions and desires. He would..."

"Rarity and some pony sitting in a tree..." Pinkie chanted under her breath.

The unicorn heard her and scoffed. "Oh, you!"

She tossed a cushion at her. Pinkie caught it with a laugh.

"A stallion like that is hard to find, my lady! If stallions like that were a dime a dozen, I would have gotten married years ago!"

"Still," Rarity shrugged. "I can dream, can't I?"

"Is this your card?" Discord asked as he held up a three of clubs.

Applebloom shook here head. "No, it was..."

"Seven of hearts, I know."

The filly blinked. "Yeah. But why didn't you pick that out of the deck?"

"That's because it's not in the deck anymore!" He gestured to her head. "You're now wearing it as a bow."

Discord summoned a mirror and Applebloom gasped at the sight of her hair bow. It was now white, decorated with hearts and the number seven.

"Amazing!" she uttered.

"Indeed," Applejack agreed. "Yes, this is all amazing, but I really must see your niece."

Discord made his cards disappear and returned Applebloom's ribbon to normal. "Wouldn't you rather see me pull myself out of a hat?"

"Yeah!" Applebloom said excitedly.

"No!" her sister exclaimed. "I'm sure it's incredible and all, but we don't have time for this nonsense!"

The draconequus glared at the pagecolt. "Nonsense?! I'll show *you* nonsense!"

He raised his claw to strike, only for it to be slapped by a yellow hoof.

"That's enough, Discord!" Fluttershy demanded.

"You two may go now," Cranky Doodle said as he shoved past them. "I can take it from here."

"But this colt insulted me!" Discord shouted, pointing accusingly at Applejack.

"Discord," Fluttershy warned. "Don't make me use the Stare on you!"

"Oh, please! You know that doesn't work on me!"

"Then at least control yourself!"

"Don't tell me what to do, mare!"

Applejack and Applebloom watched as the couple argued, their heads moving from side to side as if they were watching a tennis match.

"I'm glad we didn't come here first," Applebloom whispered. "This place is a madhouse!"

"Count to ten!" Fluttershy commanded.

"I will not..." Discord protested.

"NOW!"

Her voice came as an explosion, causing every pony present to flinch. Discord grunted angrily.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten!" he said rapidly. "HAPPY?!"

"Keep counting," Fluttershy said as she led him away, "until you've calmed down."

"Eleven," Discord groaned, "twelve, thirteen..."

Once the pair was out of sight, Applejack shook her head and spoke to the donkey.

"As I was sayin', sir..."

"My lady has fallen ill," Cranky Doodle said gruffly. "So I suggest you be on your way."

Applejack raised her eyebrow cynically. She knew Lady Rarity was not really sick. She herself had used the same excuse numerous times to turn away suitors.

"And I wish her well," the pagecolt replied. "Nevertheless, I must

speak with her."

Cranky scowled. "She is asleep."

"I'm sure she is, and I still desire to speak with her."

The donkey scoffed in disbelief. "Have you no decency that you cannot afford to come back when my lady is in better spirits?! She is not seeing any pony today! So take your little pest and go!"

Applebloom gasped at this insult. Applejack stomped her hoof in frustration. She reached through the bars of the gate and shocked the donkey as she grabbed him by the shirt.

"Listen, you!" she shouted in his face. "I will not tolerate such rudeness, especially towards my sister! Now you go in there and tell yerr lady that we will not leave this spot until we're let in to see her! Ya got that?!"

The donky gulped and nodded dumbly.

"What's to be said to him, milady?" Cranky asked his mistress after relaying his encounter with the pagecolt. "Nothing I say drives him away! Did I mention he threatened me?!"

"Oh, he sounds so vulgar!" Rarity exclaimed, but then paused to ponder. "But admirably persistent."

"I'll bet he's cute too," Pinkie snickered.

Indeed, the unicorn found herself to be curious of this colt, though she was not sure why.

"What kind of stallion is he?" she inquired her servant.

"Why," the donkey replied, "of stallion-kind."

Rarity rolled her eyes. "What manner of stallion?"

Cranky grunted. "Very *ill* -mannered, I'll tell you."

"How old is he?"

He tapped his chin. "I can't really tell. Not really old enough for a stallion nor young enough for a colt. I'll bet he's not even eighteen yet."

"Is he handsome?"

"Well, I...I suppose his face is...youthful. Why, madam?"

"What of the filly?" she asked, ignoring his question. "Why is she with this colt?"

"He said it's his sister. He was rather protective over her."

"A stallion who cares for family," Rarity whispered.

The more she heard about this pagecolt, the more intrigued she became. Strange, she had never felt this way towards any other messengers who paid court for their masters. Perhaps it was his tenacity, or his defense for his sister. What did he look like? What did he speak like?

"Should I have the guards send them off, milady?" Cranky Doodle asked.

"No," Rarity commanded softly. "Let them come, but only the colt and the filly. Have them meet me in the parlor, and call Fluttershy and Sweetie Belle and tell them to wear their veils."

"But madam, I thought you didn't want..."

"That's an order, Cranky."

The donkey bowed. "As you wish, my lady."

As Cranky left the room, Rarity reached into her coin purse and handed a few bits to the fool.

"Here's for the entertainment and comfort you have given me."

Pinkie shook her head. "You've been through a lot. Today's show

was free!"

The unicorn smiled. "Nevertheless, you need to eat."

The earth pony took a moment to ponder. "Point taken."

She held out her hat and let Rarity drop the coins in.

"Thanks a heap!" Pinkie chimed as she put her hat back on. "See ya tomorrow!"

The jester exited the room with a skip in her step and a song in her heart:

" *Cuz I love to see you smile, smile, smile!*

Yes I do!

It fills my heart with sunshine all the while... "

Rarity giggled as the pink pony's song faded away. Fluttershy poked her veiled head in the doorway.

"Is everything alright, my lady?"

The unicorn then remembered what she was supposed to do and led her hoofmaid into the hall.

"Come, Fluttershy. We will hear what this messenger has to say."

When Applejack and Applebloom entered the parlor, they were met with three veiled figures. Two of them were obviously mares, the third much smaller, presumably a filly.

"Leave us, Cranky," the mare in the middle ordered the donkey.

The servant bowed and shot a glare at Applejack before turning on his hoof and exiting the room. Applejack looked back at the ladies and cleared her throat.

"Which one of you is the Lady Rarity?"

The mare in the middle stepped forth. "Speak to me. I shall answer for her. What is it you want, sir?"

Applejack squinted, hoping to get a glimpse of the mare. She could tell just by her posh, smooth voice that this lady was well-mannered and refined.

"If it please ya, ma'am, I have a message."

"Read it."

Applejack reached into her coat pocket and pulled out the folded piece of paper.

" *Most radiant, exquisite and unmatchable beauty...* "

As she read, her heart swelled at the Duke's passionate yet cheesy words. She trailed off, for this letter was too private to be heard by any pony other than the intended. She was not even sure if the lady was among them. Thus, she put down the letter and spoke directly to the mare.

"Tell me truly if you're the Lady Rarity, for I've never seen her. I'd hate to waste my speech on some pony who wasn't meant to hear it. Really, I've been practicin'!"

She heard a giggle come from the veiled filly. Though Applejack could not see the face of the mare in the middle, she could only imagine her eyebrow raising.

"What are you?" she asked. "Some sort of comedian?"

"Oh, no!" Applejack insisted, but then cringed. "Although...I promise ya I'm not what I play..."

A nudge from Applebloom helped her regain her composure. "Are ya the Lady Rarity?"

The mare paused. "Say that I was. What business do you have with me?"

"I come from the Duke Spike, madam."

"And I suppose what you have to say is nothing I haven't heard before. I heard you were saucy towards my servants."

"Beg yerr pardon, ma'am, but yerr servants weren't all sugary sweet either."

"This message must be very important for you to be so relentless. Well, since you came all this way, why don't you read it and be off?"

"With all do respect, milady, this message concerns you alone."

She glanced at the other veiled mare, figuring it was the maid she had spoken with earlier.

Rarity gazed at the young stallion through her veil. His face was indeed handsome, though a little on the feminine side. His straw-colored mane went well with his orange coat. His green eyes flared with spirit as he presented his case. The unicorn then turned her attention to the filly.

"Why did you bring your sister then?" she inquired.

"She insisted on coming," Applejack fibbed, tucking Applebloom beneath her foreleg.

"Very well." She turned to her hoofmaid. "Give us privacy." She then looked to her sister. "Sweetie Belle, keep the filly company while her brother and I speak."

"Really?!" the unicorn filly squealed, flinging off her veil. "Can I play with her?!"

Rarity suppressed a chuckle. "Yes."

"Yay!"

She raced to Applebloom and grabbed her hoof.

"Do you wanna catch frogs?"

"Are ya kiddin'?" the earth filly grinned excitedly. "I'm the frog-catchin' champ!"

"We'll see about that!"

The children laughed as they ran out together. Both Applejack and Rarity smiled at the fact that her sister got a playmate. Once Fluttershy had closed the door, the two were left alone. When Applejack faced the lady again, she found that her back was to her as she gazed out the window.

The disguised mare cleared her throat as she brought out the letter again.

" *Most radiant, exquisite and unmatchable beauty, I write to thee so that thou may knowest my heart...* "

"Very pretty."

Applejack looked up at the lady's sudden interruption. For a moment, she felt enraged. How dare the mare interrupt the letter that the Duke had poured his heart and soul into? And so coldly at that?

"You didn't let me finish," Applejack said as she attempted to hold back her anger.

"Let me guess," Rarity sighed. "My eyes shine like sapphires, my coat is as white as snow and my hair is as lovely as lilacs."

The pagecolt paused. "Actually, it was violets, but..."

"Have you nothing more to say?" the unicorn snapped.

Her tone was cold, but her voice was etched with sorrow. Applejack wondered what this mare looked like. Was she truly as beautiful as described by the Duke? She must be, otherwise what was the point of her being here?

"Dear lady," she said cautiously, "may I see your face?"

Rarity turned and faced her abruptly. "Did your master command that you talk to my face?"

"Well, uh..."

"Very well. You might as well see what you are wasting your time with."

Applejack was genuinely stunned at the lady's response. Surely she expected her to refuse her request or at least be less eager.

Slowly, the lady lifted her veil and Applejack saw the face of the Duke's beloved.

Her fur was a pure white. Her silky violet mane was delicately curled outward. Her eyelashes fell gently over her gleaming blue eyes which were indeed the color of sapphires.

Applejack felt a sharp pain in her chest. The mare was beautiful. No, she was gorgeous! She was perfectly poised as she stood tall and straight, her chin pointing upward, showing off the perfect shape of her neck.

It was no wonder the Duke loved her. Any male would be a fool not to fall in love with her at first sight. She imagined that if she were a real stallion, she would be in love with her too, but as she was a mare, that was not the case. Instead of love, she felt jealousy.

She could not help it. The lady was the loveliest mare she had ever seen, much lovelier than her. She was so refined and well-formed, more than she would ever be.

Rarity watched the colt's reaction. His green eyes were wide with...what? Shock? Awe? Admiration? He was silent for a long while. She expected this, for this was how most stallions reacted upon first glance of her.

She became weary of the pagecolt's expression and decided to break the ice.

"Is it not well done?" she asked.

Applejack shook out of her trance and nodded.

"Excellently done," she replied in a choked voice. "It...it's a pity you are not married, madam."

"I think not. You see, good youth, many are happy to know I am single. If I marry, many hearts will be broken."

Applejack sighed. "You're too proud, milady. Nevertheless, my master," she gulped, "loves you."

"So I've been told," Rarity grumbled. "How does he love me?"

"He loves you with a burnin' passion," the disguised mare said, paraphrasing the Duke's letter, "with flames that scorch his fireproof skin..." She felt her heart grow heavier as she said these words. "He pines for ya, he suffers for ya... Do ya remember those gems he sent you a while back? He was savin' those for breakfast. He'd run through fire for ya...well, his skin is fireproof, so it wouldn't hurt him, but still! He'd do anything for ya! He loves ya more than life itself! He..."

"Enough!"

Applejack jumped back as the unicorn screamed at him.

"Enough, I say!" She turned away, tears forming in her eyes. "I don't want to hear any more of this! I've told your master time and time again that I cannot love him!"

"How can you not?" Applejack gasped. "He's good, he's kind, he's passionate..." She blushed deeply. "He's handsome..."

"Yes, yes, YES, I KNOW!" She spun around furiously. "But I cannot love him! I suppose he is...noble and just and virtuous, but I cannot love him!" She buried her face in her hooves. "I wish he would understand that!"

Applejack was the one who did not understand. What was there not to love about the Duke? True, she thought his constant wallowing pathetic, but what else was to be expected from someone suffering from unrequited love? She knew she could not force the lady to love him, but she was her master's only chance for happiness and could not afford to lose her.

"If I may speak freely, milady," Applejack said in a dangerously low voice, "I...I think you are the cruelest pony I've ever met!"

Rarity looked up at the colt in shock. "What?"

"You heard me! This boy loves you! He worships the ground you walk on! Why, if I was ever so lucky to have such love, I would...I would..."

"What would you do?" the unicorn asked softly.

"I certainly wouldn't cast him...I mean her aside! I would be his...hers! I would be her servant, her slave, her best friend! I would be loyal to her! I would be honest with her, share everything with him...her! I would never be false! Even if this pony did not return my feelings, I would still remain loyal! But I would not fight for him...her! I would be what she wants me to be! I would do whatever I can to make her happy, even if it meant ruinin' my own happiness! I will love this pony with all my heart and never take 'em for granted! Even if he...she shuts me out, denies me, shuns me, I...I will always remain true."

Rarity had listened to the colt's passionate declaration and watched the emotion dance in his eyes and face. She could tell he meant every word and found her heart racing along with his fire. When he fell silent, she realized she had been holding her breath and slowly released the air from her lungs in a sigh of awe.

Applejack herself was stunned at her speech. Where had these feelings come from? She had never been a romantic and thus these thoughts had never occurred to her. So what caused them to slip out?

As she mentally reviewed her words, she slowly realized that she had been talking about someone in particular, someone she had fallen for but had not known it.

It was the Duke Spike.

She then remembered the Lady Rarity was standing there and was reminded of the true object of her master's affection. Even if she was not in disguise, how could she compete with a fine beauty like that?

She cleared her throat. "I apologize, milady, if I..."

"Don't," Rarity uttered, her voice barely above a whisper.

Silence fell between them again. Applejack rubbed her foreleg awkwardly as the unicorn stared intensely at her.

"Who are your parents?" she asked suddenly.

The disguised mare was surprised at this question and panicked at the answer.

"I...I'm an orphan."

Rarity blinked. "I'm sorry. Who were they, then?"

Applejack bit her lip. "I was born above my current state, but I'm content. I'm a gentlecolt, nonetheless."

The unicorn paused and turned away. "Tell your master my answer is the same."

The earth pony sighed sadly. "I wish I could change yerr mind..."

"I cannot love him. Tell me no more of his affections."

Applejack bowed courteously and turned to leave. What the unicorn said next caused her to stop abruptly in her tracks.

"That doesn't mean you can't come to me again!"

Rarity blushed at how desperate that had sounded.

"To, um...tell me how he takes it."

Applejack turned her head to raise her eyebrow at her. It was a strange request, but it also meant she had another chance to win her for her master. Whether the disguised mare had affections for him or not, the Duke deserved happiness with the one he loved.

"If that is what you wish, madam," she replied with a nod.

She tried to leave again when the unicorn shouted, "Wait!"

Rarity spun around and walked towards the pagecolt. She reached into her pouch and placed three coins in Applejack's hoof.

"Here's for your pains," she whispered.

Applejack looked at the money. She needed to buy her and her sister's way out of Illyrimane and every extra bit counted, but she could not take it. Her task was not fulfilled and thus, did not deserve a reward. She handed it back to the lady.

"Keep yerr money, madam. I feel I've caused ya enough trouble. After all, I did come to ya while you were in mournin'. My sincerest condolences, by the way."

Rarity felt both touched and guilty at the colt's gesture. "Thank you."

Applejack bowed. "Farewell, my lady."

The unicorn watched the pagecolt's back until he had disappeared entirely. She took the opportunity to breathe again.

"Goodness," she gasped.

Her face was flushing with emotion, her blood boiling with desire, her heart pounding with passion. Everything about the young stallion ignited the flame within her: his shrill, but strong, country voice; his handsome face, his fiery eyes...

She plopped down on the daybed and smiled up at the ceiling. She wanted to do nothing but lay there and smile all day!

"'Who are your parents,' I ask," she chuckled. "'I'm a gentlecolt,' he says!" She squealed. "I'll take your word for it!"

It seemed so indiscreet. She had just met the boy and already she was acting like a giggling schoolfilly! A lady should not be acting this way, especially for one below her station!

"Oh, it doesn't matter!" she cried, grabbing a cushion and squeezing it to her chest.

Was this what being in love was like? Feeling so wonderful that

nothing else in the world mattered? And could one fall in love so quickly?

Her excitement faded away as realization washed over her. She pounded the couch in frustration.

"Oh, what a stupid mare I am! I didn't even learn his name!"

Uh oh. Poor Rarity's mistaken and AJ's falling in love. What will become of this?

Dun, dun, DUN!

Longing

I know this chapter is long overdue, but it's been a busy month.

"And then Sweetie Belle showed me this tree, and we climbed it!" Applebloom glanced at her sister. "Don't worry! I promise we didn't go too high!"

The filly was recounting her playtime with the young lady. Applejack tried to listen, but her mind was otherwise occupied. She wondered what she was going to tell the Duke. It had to be the truth, for she could not let Spike believe Rarity was in love with him when she had flat-out rejected him.

She was also thinking about her emotional outburst earlier. She had realized that this imaginary soul mate she had spoken of was not so imaginary and that she had unknowingly confessed her feelings for the Duke.

Was that what she had done? Did she love Spike?

It seemed rather silly, though interspecies romance was nothing illegal. After all, Spike was courting the unicorn lady. That was the other thing. He was in love with a rich, beautiful mare. She herself was rich and of noble birth, but not as fair and proper. There was also the fact that she was supposed to be a stallion. That sort of romance was definitely looked down upon, but she could not reveal herself. That would not only endanger her, but her sister as well.

She told herself that what she felt towards the Duke was just a fleeting affection. Indeed, she had never spent so much time with a male close to her age other than her brother, so it was natural for her to feel a sort of intimacy. No, this was not love, just affection.

"Did you see her?"

Applejack had been so lost in thought that she had not realized they

had entered the throne room. The short dragon leapt off his seat and hurried toward her.

"Well, did you?"

She felt a lump in her throat as she gazed into those shining, hopeful eyes.

"I..." she choked. "I did see her, my lord."

His eyes widened. "You did?! Excellent! I knew you were the stallion for the job! What did she say?"

The lump in her throat was joined by an ache in her stomach.

"She, uh...she..." She sighed in defeat. "Her answer is the same, my lord."

His hopeful expression disappeared. This did not make Applejack feel any better. He stared at her for a long time and then turned around with an angry groan.

"Give her time, my lord!" Applejack insisted. "She did just lose her brother, after all!"

He still said nothing, though she could have sworn she heard a sniff. She had to comfort him somehow, give him back his hope.

"She, uh...she said your letter was...pretty."

His head shot up, but he did not turn around.

"And..." she stuttered, "she said...she thought you were...noble and...virtuous and...and just!" She drew a circle in the floor with her hoof. "There's...there's still a chance. She...she said I could come again to, uh...tell her how you take the news."

His silence was killing her. There was another long pause before he turned his head to lock eyes with her and his lips curled into a small smile.

"You really think so?"

She returned his smile, even though inside she was dying. "Eeyup."

He giggled. "Well, she at least let you see her, and you did tell her good things about me, right?"

Applejack nodded, trying not to show her guilt.

"That's good. You're right. Maybe I should give her time."

She was about to speak when he suddenly flung his tiny arms around her. She stared down at him, shocked, but relished in the warmth of his touch. Before she had the chance to return his embrace, he pulled away and awkwardly glanced at the other servants. Applejack had completely forgotten they were even watching.

"Well, uh..." Spike cleared his throat. "Good job."

She forced smile and nodded dumbly. Inside, her heart was racing and her blood was boiling with desire as she looked at him.

Sweet Celestia, she was doomed.

Discord cackled as he hid himself within the tree. In his claw he held a string that stretched to another tree and hanging in the center was a pail of water. He looked at the two pegasi in the tree across from him. One was a pale blue stallion with a black mane and green eyes. The other was a slightly darker blue and had a mane with all the colors of the rainbow and red-violet eyes. His face was feminine, but he possessed the attitude of a stallion.

"You know what to do?" Discord whispered.

They both nodded their heads and snickered.

"This is gonna be great!" the multi-colored pegasus exclaimed.

"Hush!" Discord hissed. "Some pony's coming!"

The three pranksters ducked for cover as a set of delicate hoofsteps

approached them. When Discord was sure the victim was right beneath the bucket, he signaled to his cohorts. They released both sides of the string and Discord snapped his fingers, turning the bucket upside-down. He heard a loud splash and an ear-piercing scream.

He laughed in delight. While he could have done this alone with his magic, it was always fun to have help from the outside. It also meant he could put the blame on some pony else if he got caught.

The two pegasi laughed so hard, they fell out of the tree. They stopped when they heard a familiar groan of annoyance and looked up at their wet victim.

" *He* put you up to this, didn't he?"

As soon as Discord heard Fluttershy's voice, he literally shrunk himself. The mare darted her eyes at the tree he was hiding in.

"DISCORD!"

Her voice was like a banshee. Discord did not know whether to run or take her in his arms. She was so delightfully terrifying!

"I know you're in there!" she shouted. "Come out, you coward!"

His admiration was quickly replaced with resent.

"Coward?!"

He teleported in front of her, causing the mare to gasp in surprise.

"No pony calls me a coward!" he snapped.

Fluttershy growled in anger. "This has gone far enough!" She spun towards the two stallions. "And you! What do you have to say for yourselves?!"

The lighter blue pegasus pointed at his partner in crime. "It was Rainbow Dash's idea!"

"Thanks a lot, Soarin," the multi-colored pony grumbled before

looking up at Fluttershy. "It wasn't meant for you specifically. You just happened to be the first pony who came along. Would it help if we said we were sorry?"

Fluttershy scrutinized the colt carefully to see if his apology was genuine.

"Well...okay. Just don't do it again."

"Hey!" Discord protested. "How come whenever I do something bad, you put me in a time-out, but when Dashie does something bad, you forgive him immediately?!"

"Maybe it's because he actually apologizes."

"Hey! I apologize!" He crossed his arms. "Eventually!"

"I hate to interrupt," Soarin said, "but is Lady Rarity here?"

Rainbow Dash rolled his eyes, knowing his friend was going to try courting the lady again when it was clear he did not have a chance.

"She's over by the flowerbed," Fluttershy replied, "but I warn you, she hasn't been in her wits lately."

"Well, we know that," Rainbow Dash said. "Her brother died, she wears black, she hides her face and yada, yada..."

"No, it's different this time! She's stopped wearing her veil and is wearing colors again!"

"What happened?" Soarin asked. "Is she sick?"

"She's gone cuckoo, that's what!" Discord declared, his finger moving in a circular motion near his head.

"She's been daydreaming," said Fluttershy.

"Singing to herself!"

"Twirling around like a princess!"

"Picking petals off poor, innocent flowers! She's crazier than me!"

"Weird," Rainbow uttered.

"She's been this way for days," Fluttershy explained, "ever since she received her last message from the Duke Spike."

"Ooh!" Discord exclaimed, his lips curling into a smile. "Looks like you've got some competition, Soarin!"

"You think she's finally given in to the Duke?" Rainbow Dash inquired, his face gleaming with hope. "Well, too bad, Soarin! Guess she's taken! You should move on!"

"But you said she liked me!" Soarin said, pointing accusingly at Discord.

"You said what?" Fluttershy asked, looking at the draconequus curiously.

"Of course, she likes you!" Discord insisted, though this voice was dripping with sarcasm. "She just hasn't gotten to know you well enough to love you!"

"But the Duke..." Soarin started to say.

"Oh, she doesn't care for the Duke! She told me so herself she won't marry anyone above her station! And you, my friend, are as low as any pony can get."

The knight blinked. "You're right. I am!"

"So what are you waiting for? Go accost her!"

"I will!" He flapped his wings but stopped in mid-air. "What does 'accost' mean?"

Discord slapped his face with his paw. "Charm her! Woo her! Dazzle her! Sweep her off her hooves!"

"Oh! Right."

Once the knight was out of sight, Fluttershy punched Discord in the shoulder.

"Ow!" he cried out.

"Why did you tell him that?" she demanded. "Rarity thinks nothing of him!"

"I know," Discord said with a smirk, "but it's so amusing to watch him try! Speaking of which, let's watch the show, shall we?"

He snapped his fingers and teleported the three of them behind a bush. Before them was the Lady Rarity, dressed in a bright yellow gown, sitting on a marble bench. Her eyelids fluttered and she smiled softly as she plucked petals off a daisy.

"He loves me," she sighed dreamily. "He loves me not."

"See?" Discord whispered to the others. "It *is* a colt! Or dragon. Well, a boy of some sort."

"But it can't be the Duke," Fluttershy said. "I asked her about him the other day and all she said was: 'Who?'"

"Ooh! Here comes Soarin!" The draconequus chuckled. "Now the fun really begins!"

The trio ducked as the stallion came into view. Soarin grinned goofily at the sight of Rarity. He spat on his hoof and slicked back his mane. He then breathed on his hoof and sniffed, cringing at the smell. He shrugged and approached the lady.

"Look at him," Rainbow Dash sighed. "He's so pathetic!" She turned accusingly toward the draconequus. "Why did you have to make the poor boy believe he has a chance with the Lady Rarity? He's just going to embarrass himself!"

"Exactly!" Discord exclaimed. "Watch!"

Soarin cleared his throat. "Good morrow, my lady! You are looking very..."

"Yes!" Rarity suddenly cried out, clutching the last petal to her chest. "I knew it! I knew it!"

She jumped up and twirled around, her dress flying with her body. Soarin stared at her in confusion, not knowing what to do.

"Uh...I was wondering if you were attending the jousting tournament tomorrow afternoon. You know," he ran his hoof through his mane, "I will be competing..."

He trailed off as the unicorn started humming a merry tune, which stunned him even more. He had never seen the lady this cheerful, not even before her brother died.

"I hope you will give me support..."

"I love thee!" Rarity exclaimed.

Soarin blinked, but then smiled. "Really?"

"Oh, yes, simple colt!" She picked a rose from a bush and gave it a long sniff. "Though I do not know your name, your name should not matter! That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet!"

The stallion shyly brushed his mane away from his eyes. "Well, I do have my charms... Wait. How do you not know my name?"

Rarity turned her head and finally noticed the pegasus. "Oh, Sir Soarin! When did you get here?"

Discord could not hold back his laughter as he fell to the ground. Even Fluttershy could not help snickering. Rainbow Dash, however, looked at the draconequus sternly.

"So this is all just a joke?" Fluttershy inquired. "You don't want Soarin to marry your niece?"

"Are you kidding?" Discord replied. "He's an idiot! He has as much chance as the Duke! Maybe even less!"

"Why?" Rainbow Dash demanded. "Why get his hopes up like that?"

"It's *so* much fun!"

The pegasus shook his head. "It's just not right."

"Don't be such a grump, Dashie! Where's your sense of humor?"

"It never left. There are some things that just aren't funny. You're gonna get the poor boy's heart broken."

"Oh, he'll get over it."

Rainbow Dash glanced back at Soarin and saw him walking away with his head down. The Lady Rarity thought nothing of it, as she was lost in a world of her own.

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," Rainbow whispered.

Applejack and Octavia had been conversing when the Duke Spike burst into the throne room like a madstallion.

"Music!" he shouted. "NOW!"

Octavia did not argue as she mixed her bow with her cello. The dragon sunk deep into his throne as he listened to the sweet melody. Applejack took her usual seat beside him and watched him with worry.

It had been three days since Lady Rarity's last rejection and he was not taking it as well as Applejack had hoped. Her words had not been enough to ease his pain. Until the lady accepted him, this was what he was going to be like.

"Applejack."

The mare's ears perked up at the sound of him saying her name. Spike turned to her with a small smile.

"If you ever fall in love," he said, "remember me. Of course, I doubt there is a mare who wouldn't be interested in you, but remember that love is not always this gloomy. Believe me. It's the greatest thing you can ever feel."

Applejack only nodded, her eyes never leaving his. Their heads turned when the door opened and Flash Sentry came in.

"My lord," he said, "there is a fool at the gate by the name of Pinkie Pie. She says she heard you were unhappy and has come to cheer you up. Should I let her in, sir?"

"Her?" Applejack uttered.

"Pinkie Pie, eh?" Spike said, rubbing his chin. "I think I heard that name before."

"She's an old friend of the Lady Rarity's, my lord," Flash Sentry explained.

"But of course! Bring her in!"

The guard bowed and exited the room.

"I didn't know mares could be jesters," Applejack said.

"Unusual, I know," Spike agreed. "From what I've heard, this mare is one of the craziest ponies in all of Illyrimane, which makes her the perfect fool."

Everyone stiffened as they heard a wacky tune play down the hall. The doors swung open to reveal the one-mare-band. Once her song was finished, she smiled up at the dragon.

"Greetings, oh, wise Duke of Illyrimane!" she said with a bow. "I'm Pinkie Pie and I heard you were down in the dumps so I'm here to turn that sad frown upside-down!"

"Can you sing?" Spike inquired.

"Absa-tively posi-lootely! Care for a song?"

"If you please."

Pinkie blew her starting note into her harmonica.

" *If you're happy and you know it, clap your hooves* !" she sang,

clapping her hooves twice. " *If you're happy and you know it, clap your hooves* ...err, claws?"

"Stop!" Spike commanded. "Do you know anything less...cheerful?"

Pinkie's face grew solemn. "Oh. It's one of *those* moods, isn't it?"

She stepped out of her instruments and whispered to Octavia. The gray mare nodded and began playing her cello. Pinkie closed her eyes and hung her head as she sang:

" *No pony knows the trouble I've seen.*

No pony knows my sorrow... "

Applejack did not pay much attention to the lyrics, but the melody seethed into her mind as she turned to gaze at the face of the Duke. He was smiling, but his eyes held great sadness. She longed to see him happy. Sure, she had seen occasional glimmers of excitement in him, but they never lasted long. If only he could be truly happy for just a moment.

During the past few days, she had been trying to decipher her feelings for the Duke. She found herself staring at him for long periods of time and fantasizing about him holding her in his arms. She had even dreamt about him.

Indeed, she was lost.

When Pinkie Pie finished the verse, she brought out a trumpet and played a solo.

"How do you like this song?" Spike whispered to Applejack.

The disguised mare snapped out of her trance to answer. "It gives you an idea of what bein' in love is like."

The dragon's smile grew a little and the sadness in his eyes seemed to diminish as they locked with hers. The moment was short-lived when he turned back to the pink mare.

" *No pony knows the trouble I've seen.*

No, no, no!"

Pinkie Pie waited for applause, but received none. She looked up in confusion, wondering if her performance was terrible. Then she saw the tears in the eyes of her audience. She sighed sadly. Some ponies cheered up with a few tears rather than a smile.

Spike jumped off his throne and handed the jester some gold. "Here's for your pains."

"No pain!" she piped, dropping the coins in her hat. "I take pleasure in singing!"

The dragon smirked. "Well, I'll pay you for your pleasures. That was a lovely song. I don't think I've heard it before."

"No pony has! It's from the future!"

He blinked up at her in confusion. "What?"

"Let me know when you're feeling blue again! Bye!"

She picked up her instruments and sang merrily as she trotted out the door.

"She's a strange one," Applejack murmurred.

"Yeah," Spike shrugged. "But she's apparently the best in her profession. I mean Rarity takes amusement in her. Speaking of which... Applejack, come here."

The disguised mare stood up and approached her master.

"Go to Lady Rarity's again," he whispered. "Tell her that my love will never die, no matter how hard she pushes me away."

Applejack bit her lip. "But suppose she can't..."

"Oh! And give her this."

He reached into his coat pocket and Applejack's eyes widened as they beheld a large, red, heart-shaped jewel.

"Is that a...?" she stammered.

"A fire ruby!" Spike exclaimed, his mouth watering. "I *was* saving this for lunch, but a beautiful, delicious gem like this belongs with the beautiful Lady Rarity."

Applejack's mouth remained agape as she took the jewel in her hoof. "This...this is the most generous gift anyone could offer!"

"I know, right? You think she'll like it?"

"Like it? She'll probably faint!"

"So give it to her and when she gains consciousness, tell her how much I love her."

Applejack's face fell as she recalled the purpose behind this gift. She sighed sadly as she tucked it in her coat.

"I'll try, my lord."

"I know you will," Spike said.

"But...what if she says no again? What if she's still in mourning?"

"Tell her I won't take no for an answer! Tell her I will wait for her if she so wishes!"

"If I may, my lord...are you certain this lady is The One?"

"She has to be! I dream about her all the time! They say if you dream something more than once, it must be fate!"

"I'm just sayin' that there are other ladies..."

"But none compare to the Lady Rarity!"

She saw the dreamy look in his eyes and that there was no point in trying to change his mind. The boy was unlucky in love, just as she was with him.

Okay, I should probably explain Soarin and Rainbow Dash's roles in this. While planning this story, I was puzzled on who the three bums would be (Toby, Sir Andrew and Fabian). I already explained Discord. Instead of showing them as drunks, I decided to make them pranksters and certain ponies like Derpy, Rainbow and Pinkie came to mind, but they were all female. Then considering Sir Andrew is a knight, I thought of Soarin as a Wonderbolt and figured he was wacky enough and I could picture him as the sort of stallion to fawn over Rarity. Rainbow Dash is supposed to have Fabian's role. I also made her a knight, even though in the play Fabian is a servant, and is the more self-controlled of the bunch. I didn't really see Rainbow as a common servant. Though why is she referred to as a stallion in this? I'll explain later.

I've rearranged the plot a little and have added a few scenes so I'm not just copying the play entirely. Hope you enjoyed this chapter!

In other news, I've been nominated for the Bronyland Pony Awards! "Bride of Discord" was nominated for Best Fanfiction and I was nominated for Best Author! You can vote for me and other Bronies at bronyland . com 2013/11/08/vote-for-us-for-the-pony-awards/! You should know for that they used my Fimfiction name DisneyFanatic23.

Courtship

I'm so sorry! With "Bride of Discord" plus college, I've been busy and then I got stuck on this. It's short, but it's a chapter.

The Apple sisters were surprised to find the garden gate open, but took advantage of the situation and walked through. Music was heard and they came across Sweetie Belle and Pinkie Pie, the latter playing her instruments. The mare took a bow once her song was finished and the filly clapped her hooves excitedly.

"Sweetie Belle!" Applebloom called out.

The unicorn turned her head and rushed to embrace her friend. "Applebloom! What are you doing here?"

"My brother has to deliver a message and I wanted to see ya again!"

"Ooh!" Pinkie Pie exclaimed. "A play date! That means double the fun!"

"Hey, I know you," Applejack declared. "Aren't you the Lady Rarity's fool?"

"Me? Oh, no! The only fool Rarity will ever keep will be her husband. Really, I feel sorry for whoever marries her." She whispered to the pagecolt. "She's gone crazy! Seriously, your master should just give up. She's been lost in La-La Land lately. Hey! Say that ten times fast! Lost in La-La Land lately! Lost in La-La Land lately! Lost in La..."

"Okay, okay!" Applejack interrupted. "Is yerr lady in?"

"Didn't you hear what I said? She's lost in La-La Land lately! Lost in La-La Land lately! Lost in..."

"I mean is she in the house?!"

Pinkie held out her hat. "That information is going to cost ya one bit!"

The disguised mare sighed as she fished in her pocket for a coin and dropped it in the hat.

"Yep! She's inside!"

She grinned widely at the pagecolt.

"Would you go get her, please?" Applejack asked, her patience wearing thin.

"I would, but..." Pinkie picked the coin out of her hat. "This coin is getting rather lonely. How can I do what you ask when Phillip here is so sad?"

The pagecolt narrowed her eyes at her. "Phillip?"

"That's what I named the coin! Maybe you can give him an Aurora?"

"A what?"

"You know! A friend! Someone to keep him company!"

Applejack groaned and reached back into her pocket to pull out another coin. As soon as it jingled with the first coin, Pinkie smiled and placed her hat back on her head.

"I'll get her right away! Pleasure doing business with you, sir!"

"Before you go," Applejack said, "might I ask...how did you become a court jester?"

"Oh, that! See, this was the only job the employment agency could get me! La-la-la-la-la..."

Applejack could not help but chuckle as she watched the pink pony go inside.

"Big brother!" Applebloom piped. "Can Sweetie Belle and I go play now?"

"Of course, you can. Just stay out of trouble."

The two fillies cheered in excitement and ran off into the orchard. Applejack sat herself on the stone bench and waited patiently for the lady.

Rarity's heart stopped the minute she saw the pagecolt. He looked so handsome and noble sitting on that bench. Sure, his shoulders were a little slouched but she did not care! She quickly smoothed out her dress and hair.

"Control yourself, Rarity," she breathed. "Not too fast. Oh, what if he doesn't feel the same way?" She giggled. "What am I talking about? What colt *wouldn't* feel that way about me?"

The unicorn took another deep breath and approached the colt.

"You wish to see me, sir?"

Applejack turned her head and was surprised at what she saw. The lady's face was unveiled and her black garb was replaced with an elegant yellow gown. Her face beheld a smile, something the disguised mare was not expecting to see.

Despite her curious change in appearance, Applejack stood for the lady.

"Good day, my lady," she said with a bow. "You're looking well. I see you're no longer in mourning."

Rarity glanced down shyly at her gown. "Well, I've decided it's time to stop living in the past and," she slowly returned her gaze to him, "look to the future."

"I am glad to hear that, my lady." Applejack reached into her pocket. "I have come to..."

"Oh please," the unicorn said, gently lifting the page's chin so that their eyes would meet. "Call me Rarity."

Her eyes fluttered flirtatiously, while Applejack's blinked in confusion. After staring at the lady for a long while, she kindly shoved her hoof away.

"Rarity," the disguised mare said, "the Duke did not take yerr message well. However, he did ask me to..."

"What is your name?" Rarity suddenly asked.

"Oh. Sorry. My name is Applejack, my lady."

"Applejack," the unicorn repeated with a sigh. "What a lovely name."

"Err, thank you. Anyway, my master..."

"Where are you from?"

"What?"

"I asked: where are you from?"

"Haystings. My lady, my master's love will never die and he will wait..."

"Oh, enough about him!"

Applejack cried out as the lady suddenly grabbed her foreleg and sat her down on the bench beside her.

"Let's talk about *you* !" Rarity insisted. "How long have you been in the Duke's services? What do you do in your spare time? Is there a mare in your life?"

The disguised mare scooted away. "My lady, my master..."

"I bade you never to speak of him again! But," Rarity said, moving closer to him, "if you know of some pony else who loves me, you could...tell me."

Applejack flinched as the unicorn touched her hoof.

"Nope!" she exclaimed, immediately standing up. "No pony that I know!"

Rarity curled her lip in a pout. *Be patient, Rarity,* she thought to herself. *You were just being too forward, that's all.*

Meanwhile, Applejack was flabbergasted with the situation. The lady was surely mad, but the page had a job to do.

"The Duke got you a present," she said.

Rarity groaned. "I will not accept any more gifts from..."

She gasped at the sight of the jewel. "Is that...a fire ruby?!"

Applejack nodded. "I shall have you know he was saving it for lunch."

The unicorn was torn between the jewel and her own principles, not to mention her wish that this gift was coming from the pagecolt and not the Duke. It seemed she was never going to get anywhere with him unless she complied with his request for her to accept the Duke's courtship. She tried to hide her grin as a plan formulated in her brain.

"I'll, uh..." she uttered, slowly taking the ruby in her hoof, "consider it. I will at least give the Duke the chance to get to know me better. Do you...that is, does your master, care for jousting?"

"Jousting?" Applejack repeated, raising an eyebrow. "I...I'm not sure, ma'am."

"Well, tell your master that if he wishes to court me, he will meet me at the jousting tournament tomorrow afternoon. You may also come, if you wish."

Applejack grinned, but also felt a stab of pain. This was the Duke's chance to win the mare of his dreams, but it also meant losing the dragon of her dreams.

"I'm sure the Duke would love to come!" she squeaked.

"Until tomorrow, then?" Rarity asked.

Applejack bowed politely. "Tomorrow, my lady."

"Please, Applejack. Call me Rarity."

The pagecolt sighed. "Rarity."

Rarity watched with a heavy heart as the stallion walked away. Surely he was attracted to her. All stallions were. He just did not know it yet because he was focused on his task to woo her for his master. She had to make him realize that it was him she wanted, not the Duke.

And she knew exactly how to do it.

Applejack was surprised not to find the Duke in the throne room. It was empty. Not even Octavia was there. She began searching the manor and came across the Lady Twilight in the library.

"Twilight!" Applejack called.

The unicorn looked up from her book. "Oh, Applejack! You're back!"

"Where's the Duke? I have a message from the Lady Rarity."

"He's taking one of his seven-hour bubble baths. He asked me to tell you when you came back to go help him. He gets a little fussy after the first hour."

Applejack stiffened. "Ya want me to...help him...bath?!"

"I used to help him all the time, but since he learned how children were made...well..." She blushed. "He just finds it awkward, considering we're not really brother and sister. It's not a problem for you, is it?"

Applejack wanted to scream that she was uncomfortable with this request, but then the lady would be pressing her with questions and her secret would be at risk.

"I...I'll get to it right away."

Applejack felt the lump in her throat grow bigger with each step she took towards the bathing chamber. It was hard enough to control her feelings for the Duke as it was. She could not imagine how she

would react at the sight of him bathing.

Taking a deep breath, she turned the knob and opened the door. The dragon was in a tub full of bubbles, trying to reach a spot on his back with a sponge. He turned to her and smiled.

"There you are, Applejack! I have this itch on my back that I cannot reach. Could you lend me a hoof?"

Abruptly, Applejack slammed the door, causing the Duke to raise an eyebrow. She panted heavily as she leaned against the door. Seeing him without clothing was one thing, but being asked to *touch* him while in that state was another!

She breathed deeply as she counted to ten in her head.

"Take it easy, Applejack," she muttered to herself. "Control yourself. So what if he's naked? You've caught Big Macintosh without his pants and ya didn't get worked up about that! It's no big deal!"

After taking another breath, she opened the door once again.

"Sorry for that, my lord," she said, trying not to stare at him.

"Don't worry about it," Spike assured her. "Come on, are you going to scrub my back or what?"

Applejack gulped and slowly approached the tub, still averting her eyes from the naked dragon. Spike lifted her hoof and placed the sponge in it.

"It's right about here," he said, turning around and pointing.

She had no choice. She had to look. She turned and gazed at the green spines going down his scaly purple back. As she gently pushed the sponge against them, she tried her best not to make actual contact.

"A little higher," Spike demanded. "Higher...a little to the left...ah!" He sighed with pleasure. "Oh yeah, that's the stuff!"

Applejack could not help but chuckle and she found herself staring

as she scrubbed lazy circles on his back.

"So what did the Lady Rarity say?"

This question snapped her back to reality.

"Oh. Well...she said she'd like to get to know ya better."

"Really?"

Without warning, he spun around and stood up, revealing the lower half of his body. Applejack quickly shielded her eyes with her hoof.

"What else?" the dragon pleaded.

She tried to find words but found it so hard to concentrate, knowing he was standing there stark naked.

"There's no need to be so squeamish," Spike said. "We're both males here."

"I'm just being polite, sir," she choked. "Would...would you mind gettin' back in the tub, please?"

The dragon rolled his eyes and sat back down for her convenience.

"Anyway," Applejack breathed, getting over her shock, "she asked ya to meet her at the jousting tournament tomorrow afternoon."

"Jousting?" Spike repeated, standing up again, thus causing Applejack to look away again. "Jousting?! I hate jousting!"

"Well," the pagecolt gulped, "Lady Rarity apparently likes it."

"But it's just so...violent!"

"Do ya want the girl or not?" she asked, gently lowering him into the tub.

"Okay, fine! But I haven't been to a jousting match in ages! I don't know the rules! What if she asks me what I think and I look like a fool?"

"Don't worry, my lord," Applejack assured him, her discomfort slipping away as she started scrubbing him again. "I could teach ya. My father used to take me to jousts all the time."

"It's not the jousting that worries me! I...I just don't know what I would...say to her."

Applejack stopped scrubbing to raise an eyebrow at him. "Wait a minute. Have you actually ever... *talked* to this mare?"

Spike blushed. "Well...I did say hello to her...once."

The mare put her hoof to her face. "Unbelievable."

"What?"

"You're tellin' me that you've been pinin' over this girl for Celestia knows how long and you've never exchanged more than two words of conversation with her?! You're sendin' me to get her to be yerr wife and you barely even know her?!"

She angrily threw the sponge into the tub. "Forgive me, my lord, but I've never heard of anything more pathetic!"

Spike's gazed up at the disguised mare in shock. Applejack panicked at the thought that he was going to fire her, but to her surprise, he laughed.

"You're not mad?" she asked in confusion.

"Mad?" Spike repeated. "You're the only pony who's been stallion enough to talk to me like that since my father died!"

"I...huh?"

"Promise me, Applejack, that from now on, you will be completely open and honest with me. Don't be one of those marish suck-ups, okay? If you have something to say, say it. Don't think you'll offend me. You promise?"

Applejack wanted to tell him everything at that moment, but she could not. She solemnly made the promise, but it hurt her, knowing

she would not be able to keep it.

"Good," Spike said. "You're right, by the way. I should have talked to her, but I'm always so uneasy around her. Could you help me come up with something to say?"

She grinned slightly. "Of course, my lord."

"And none of that 'my lord' stuff! When we're in private, call me Spike."

Her heart swelled as she called him by his name for the first time:

"Very well...Spike."

Hehe...that bathing scene was paying homage to the movie version with Helena Bonham Carter. I thought it would add to the comedy aspect of this story. There was nothing about jousting in the play. Like I said, I'm adding my own spin to it.

Life and Love

I am so, SO sorry! I've had a lot on my plate: school, other pony projects... I was starting to lose inspiration for this and was close to abandoning it. But I'm back! And I forced myself to finish this chapter!

Soarin paced back and forth in front of the blue tent, his armor clanking with every step he took. He then decided he could not take it anymore and called to the pony inside.

"Hurry up, Rainbow Dash! It's almost time for the tournament and you've been taking forever!"

"Give me a minute!" Rainbow cried. "Ow! Scootaloo! Not so tight!"

Soarin tapped his hoof as he waited for his comrade. A few minutes later, the cyan pegasus emerged from the tent in his suit of armor. Following him was a young orange pegasus colt with a purple mane wearing a squire's uniform.

"You know," Soarin said, "it would be a whole lot faster if we changed together. Why do you always insist on changing alone?"

"I have my reasons," Rainbow said bluntly before turning to his squire. "Scootaloo, fetch my lance."

The young colt saluted. "Yes, sir! Right away, Sir Rainbow Dash!"

Rainbow could not help but giggle as the lad skittered off.

"Say, uh, Rainbow?" Soarin uttered, nervously rubbing the back of his neck.

"Yeah?" Rainbow replied.

"Could you, uh...go a little easy on me?"

"Soarin, Soarin, Soarin. Even if I do go easy on you, you know I'll beat you. I always beat you."

"Yeah, but...you see...Lady Rarity is watching today and..."

Rainbow rolled his eyes. "Why don't you just forget about her? She's way, way, *way* out of your league."

"But if I look like a hero, maybe she won't think that! Please, Rainbow? Help a buddy out?"

Rainbow cringed as the light blue pegasus fell on his knees. He wanted to say no, as he did not want to see his comrade get his heart broken. On the other hoof, impressing this lady meant a lot to him.

After much thought, Rainbow let out a sigh.

"Okay, okay. I'll go easy on you. But don't guarantee a victory. I've got a reputation to uphold."

His cheeks turned pink as Soarin suddenly flung his hooves around his neck.

"Thanks, Rainbow Dash! You're a pal!"

Meanwhile, the Duke Spike and his party were settling into their seats. Since the dragon was Duke of Illyrimane, he had his own box, and a throne, of course. He insisted that Applejack sit beside him, followed by Twilight. Applebloom was content sitting at her sister's hooves, since the other two seats were reserved for the Lady Rarity and her lady in waiting. Standing at Lady Twilight's side was Flash Sentry, who was there for protection.

"Oh, this is so exciting!" Twilight exclaimed. "I haven't been to a joust since Father passed away."

"You like jousts, milady?" Applejack inquired.

"Oh, yes! I find it all quite fascinating and suspenseful! I wish I were

allowed to joust!"

"Don't be ridiculous, Twilight," Spike huffed. "Mares don't joust."

The dragon glanced around and then whispered to Applejack. "I don't see her. You think she forgot?"

"She said she'd be here," Applejack said with a shrug. "Remember, she invited you."

"Look," Twilight proclaimed. "There's the Lady Rarity."

Spike turned to where his sister was pointing and froze at the sight of the white unicorn and her entourage coming up the pews.

"What do I do?!" he asked Applejack in desperation. "What do I say?!"

"'Hello' would be a start," Applejack murmured.

Rarity approached the Duke slowly, her gaze filled with disinterest.

"Good afternoon, my lord," she said.

Spike tried to speak, but his tongue had tied itself in a knot. The mare's beauty was just too distracting! Applejack had to give him a hard poke in the side to get a word out. The result was:

"HALOOO!"

The dragon winced in embarrassment. Rarity just raised an eyebrow at him. Then she turned to the pagecolt and smiled brightly.

"Good afternoon, Master Applejack."

Applejack bowed her head. "Milady."

"And Twilight! So nice to see you, darling."

"Nice to see you too, Rarity," the purple unicorn said with a grin.

Spike glanced between them in confusion. "You two know each other?"

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Yes, we met at the Summer Sun Celebration last year! Don't you listen to a word I say?"

"Where shall I sit, my lord?" Rarity asked the dragon.

Spike tried to speak again, but as soon as his eyes locked with those sparkling sapphires, he was back to being dumbstruck. Applejack came to his rescue.

"My master wishes that you be seated beside him."

"Very well," Rarity said, sitting down. "Fluttershy, you may sit by me."

"Where will *I* sit?" Discord complained, crossing his arms.

"You can sit in the pews, Uncle. Just don't frighten away the other lords and ladies."

"You can have my seat," Fluttershy said softly.

The draconequus stopped her from rising. "No, no. I'll just make my own seat."

He snapped his fingers and suddenly the box was wider and Discord was sitting on a black and red throne. Rarity rolled her eyes with a groan. At least he was not hurting any pony.

"Where's your donkey, milady?" Applejack asked.

The white unicorn smiled as she faced the pagecolt. "Cranky? He takes no pleasure in jousts. 'Uncivil,' he calls them. What about you? What do you think of these tournaments?"

"I think they're darn right excitin' and challengin' events."

"Oh," Fluttershy uttered. "I hope no pony gets hurt."

"Says the mare who knocked me upside the head three times this morning," Discord grumbled.

"Who do you think will win?" Rarity asked Applejack. "My money is

on Sir Rainbow Dash. He's won sixteen tournaments this past year!"

"Sir Soarin is nearly as good," Twilight said.

"They are both personal friends of mine," said Discord, "and I don't have to attend these things to know that Dashie *always* beats Soarin."

Applejack shrugged. "Maybe he'll get lucky. Don't you think so, my lord?"

Spike was too busy staring at Rarity to hear. "Huh?"

Applejack groaned, knowing that this was going to be a long day.

Applebloom crossed her hooves as the adults conversed with each other, barely even noticing she was there. Her ears perked up as she heard a "Pssst!" She looked up to see Sweetie Belle crouched down on the floor, her hoof beckoning her to follow her. Applebloom smiled mischievously and complied with her command.

"Let's go exploring," Sweetie Belle whispered once they were out of the box.

"Yeah," Applebloom nodded. "They'll hardly notice we're gone anyway."

They crept along the pews and down the steps, careful not to attract attention from the nobles. Then they snuck behind the stands to where the knights were strapping on their armor. They ducked behind a tent and watched as an orange pegasus colt with purple hair carried a lance to one of the knights.

"You're late, Scootaloo," Sir Rainbow Dash grumbled as he took his weapon. "But you're earlier than Soarin's squire."

"Where is that boy, anyway?" Soarin questioned. "Button Mash!"

The pegasus tapped his foot as he waited. A minute later, a brown earth colt with reddish-brown hair came panting, carrying a heavy lance.

"What took you so long?" Soarin demanded.

"Sorry, sir!" Button wheezed, still catching his breath. "I was watching those knights over there fence!"

"How many times have I told you? If you ever want to be a knight, you have to focus!"

"I have focus! I'm like a ninja! Always aware! Always... Ooh, look at that butterfly!"

The spying fillies giggled at the scene.

"He's cute," Sweetie Belle whispered.

"Which one?" Applebloom asked. "The orange one that looks like a girl?"

"No, the brown one with the short attention span who thinks he's a ninja." The unicorn filly sighed. "He's silly in an adorable way."

"What's a ninja, anyway?"

"No idea."

"Oh, I can't watch!" Fluttershy cried, covering her eyes as the two stallions charged for each other.

"Don't worry, my dear," Discord assured her. "They'll be fine. They're professionals."

Applejack only vaguely heard what was going on around her. As much as she loved a good joust, her attention was on the dragon sitting on the throne beside her. His attention was on the fair white unicorn next to him, but Applejack did not care. Just getting to look at him was enough.

Then as she tilted her head to find a better angle, she noticed the Lady Rarity staring in her direction. She assumed the unicorn was returning the Duke's gaze, until she saw that she was leaning

forward and looking past him. Applejack glanced behind her, trying to find what had captured the lady's interest. She looked back and found her eyes locked with Lady Rarity's.

Applejack stiffened in horror as she realized what the object of the unicorn's fascination was.

She did not understand. Why was she looking at her and not her master? What was it about her the lady found more interesting than the Duke? Was there something on her face?

The dreamy gaze Rarity was sending her made Applejack wriggle in discomfort. Then she saw that gleam in her eyes which was all too familiar. She looked down at her male garb.

Uh oh , she thought.

It was impossible and downright creepy, but the signs told all. The Lady Rarity was not in love with the Duke, because she had fallen in love with *her* !

This was bad. The Lady Rarity could not be in love with her! For one thing, Applejack was not even a real stallion! For another, it was her job to match the unicorn with her master! Third, she was in love with someone else, who was in love with the very mare who was in love with her!

Applejack put her hoof to her head, feeling like she was going to faint.

She shook herself back to her senses, telling herself the whole idea was ridiculous. The lady could not be in love with her. If she was, Applejack had to correct her. She could not reveal her identity, but she had to show her unavailability somehow.

She turned toward the Lady Twilight, who was too enthralled in the tournament to notice her distress. Flash Sentry was guarding her side, smiling as he watched her. Knowing this was a dangerous but necessary move, Applejack took her mistress' hoof.

Twilight's eyes widened at her touch. She glanced down at their hooves and then at the pagecolt in bewilderment. Applejack tilted

her head towards the Lady Rarity, who was just as confused as Twilight.

"What are you...?" the purple unicorn started to ask.

"Just pretend, milady," Applejack whispered. "I'll explain later."

Twilight glanced nervously at Flash Sentry, who was glaring at the disguised mare. Applejack hastily shook her head, insisting that it was not what he thought!

"Explain now," Twilight whispered.

Applejack sighed. "Lady Rarity keeps lookin' at me. I want her to think I'm taken."

"Ah," her mistress said, nodding in understanding. "Very well, but just the hooves."

"Thank ya, Twilight."

The purple unicorn sent her secret lover a glance, telling him that she would explain later. Applejack sighed in relief when she saw that Lady Rarity was no longer staring. Now that that problem was solved, she had to fix the other. She nudged her master, snapping him out of his trance.

"Say something to her," she whispered.

"Huh?" Spike uttered. "Oh, yeah." He turned to Rarity. "Um...you, uh...you...I..."

Applejack groaned and pushed him hard. Unfortunately, all that did was knock him off his throne.

"Are you alright, my lord?!" Applejack asked in panic. "I'm so sorry!"

"I'm fine," Spike grumbled.

He blushed in embarrassment as he crawled back into his seat. Rarity looked at him strangely for a moment and then returned her attention back to the match.

When the two knights had cleared the field, a small orange colt stepped out and addressed the audience.

"Mares and gentlecolts, lords and ladies, townsponies and peasants! I give you the most fearless, most daring, most amazing pegasus ever to come out of the grand city of Cloudsdale! The great champion, Sir Rainbow Dash!"

The crowd stomped their hooves in applause as the noble knight came onto the field, blowing kisses to his adoring fans. Discord noticed Fluttershy's spirits lift and she clapped her hooves excitedly. He followed her gaze towards Rainbow Dash and then looked back at her.

The draconequus felt a twist in his heart and a boiling in his stomach. He was not sure why, but he felt...envious.

Another squire, this one brown, came into view, but was more nervous.

"Um..." he stammered. "M-m-mares and g-g-gentlecolts...I, uh...here is...Sir Soarin!"

Button raced off before his knight could appear. The applause was less enthusiastic.

Rainbow Dash watched as Soarin glanced over at the Lady Rarity. It would mean a lot to his friend if he won for once, and in front of the mare he desired. The multi-colored pegasus sighed, knowing he was going to regret this.

The referee made his call and the two knights charged for each other. The ponies watched in anticipation as their lances drew nearer and nearer.

"Come on, Rainbow Dash," Fluttershy whispered.

It looked like Sir Rainbow was going to win, but at the last minute, he turned his weapon away from his opponent and Soarin's lance struck him hard in the chest, sending him flying backward into a pile of hay. The audience gasped, as they had never seen Sir Rainbow Dash lose. Once they got over their shock, they cheered Soarin's

name and the ladies tossed roses at the victor.

Soarin took a moment to bask in his glory before turning to help his friend.

"Thanks, Rainbow Dash," Soarin whispered as he lifted him out of the hay. "You're the best."

Rainbow groaned as he rubbed his aching chest. "Don't remind me."

Applejack knew she was dreaming, for she wore a dress. She had not worn a dress in weeks. For a second she hoped her entire male masquerade had been the dream and she was awake now. Then she heard a familiar, deep voice:

"We've been through this, Applejacqueline!"

She turned around to see Big Macintosh, alive and angry. She wanted to rejoice at seeing him, but for some reason she shouted something else:

"So you'll remember that I don't wanna marry Blueblood! I don't love him!"

Big Macintosh stomped his hoof. "You'll learn to love him!"

"Why him? Of all the stallions in the world, why him?"

"He's the only suitor who can withstand yerr unladylike behavior!"

"He just wants our money, Big Mac! He doesn't care for me!"

"I'm yerr brother! I'm the head of this family now, so I decide what's best for ya!"

"You're not Father, Big Mac! Ya can't tell me what to do! Only I know what's best for me!"

"You're marryin' Prince Blueblood and that's final!"

He recoiled as she spat in his face. "Go jump in the sea!"

Big Macintosh was about to respond when the room shook suddenly and the two of them were knocked off their hooves.

"What the devil?" Applejack uttered.

The door swung open and Applebloom stood there panting.

"Big Mac! Applejacqueline! There's a big storm out there!"

She squealed as the room tilted and she gripped the door for balance.

"Come here, sis," Applejack said, opening her forelegs for the filly.

She held her sister tight and Big Macintosh wrapped his forelegs around them both.

"I'm scared," Applebloom said with a shiver.

"Don't worry, sis," Applejack said, stroking her mane. "Everything will be alright."

"Eeyup," Big Macintosh agreed.

Applejack's head shot up at the sound of water and a wave came bursting through the door. The three siblings screamed as it swept over them. Applejack could feel her brother's hooves slipping from her body.

"No!" she shouted. "Big Macintosh!"

"Applejack!" her brother cried. "Applejack!"

The second time he called her name was not in his voice, but Twilight's.

"Applejack, wake up!"

Her eyes opened to see the purple unicorn standing over her and shaking her wildly.

"What's goin' on?" Applebloom yawned from the bunk above.

"Twilight, what is it?" Applejack inquired.

"It's Spike!" Twilight cried. "I went to check on him, like I do every night when he's asleep, but he wasn't in bed! And I found this note on his desk!"

She handed Applejack the paper and she scanned over the words:

Whosoever shalt read this shalt know that I have quitted this world. Being without love, I shall throw myself into the sea...

Applejack could not read any further and demanded, "Where is he?!"

"I came to you as soon as I found this!" Twilight exclaimed.

"Why?! He could be drowned by now!"

"I don't think so! The ink is fresh! But if my brother is about to commit suicide, you must convince him not to!"

"Why me?"

"You're the only one he'll listen to!"

"He hasn't even known me that long!"

"Doesn't matter! He trusts you! We've got to find him!"

"He said he'd throw himself into the sea. Where would he go?"

Twilight gasped. "There's a cliff just beyond the garden gate. Oh, Applejack! You must hurry!"

Applejack did not argue and bolted out of the room. She did not stop once, not even to check if she was going the right way. She prayed that she was not too late and that the love of her life was not gone from this world! What would drive him to take his own life?

There was a thunderstorm outside and already, Applejack was getting drenched, but she did not care. The garden gate was fast approaching and it was hanging open. Once she was beyond it, she

finally came to a halt.

Just as Twilight had predicted, Spike was standing at the edge of a cliff, gazing down at the black water. His back was to her, so Applejack had to make her presence known.

"Spike!"

The Duke turned his head. His surprise was quickly replaced with anger.

"Don't come any closer!" he shouted coldly.

"Spike!" Applejack cried in desperation, forgetting to disguise her voice. "Why are you doin' this?!"

"Why? WHY?! Because she doesn't love me! She hardly paid me any attention at the tournament today! And me...I was so stupid! I couldn't say a word to her! I...I just can't take it anymore!"

Tears were forming in the mare's eyes. "Spike, please! This isn't the answer!"

"And I get why! I'm a terrible duke!"

"That's not true!"

"Yes, it is! The ponies are right! Father shouldn't have made me ruler! I'm not even his real son! I'm not even a pony! I wasn't even ready for this!"

It was his turn to cry. "Did any pony tell you how old I was?"

Applejack opened her mouth and realized that they had not.

"I'm fifteen! I'm just a boy! I can't run a whole duchy! I can't even get the love of my life to notice me!" He gazed back down at the rocks and water below. "No pony will even care when I'm gone!"

"I'll care!" Applejack shouted over the howling wind and thunder. "So will Twilight! She cares for you, and loves ya like a brother! Do ya really think she would be better off without ya?"

"She can have a life, not having to worry about me!"

"What if she ends up like the Lady Rarity? She swore off stallions after *her* brother died! Do ya want Twilight to suffer the same fate?"

"At least she'll honor her memory of me!"

"And what if some stallion comes and asks for her hoof and she rejects him? He might suffer like you!"

"No pony suffers like I do! No pony loves like I do!"

"But *I* do!"

Spike paused and faced the pagecolt again. Applejack stiffened at what she had just revealed. She wanted to take it back, but she had to convince him that she understood what he was going through and that he was not alone.

"I mean I know of a pony," she said, "who loved like you did!" She paused as she chose her words carefully. "I...I didn't always have one sibling. My father had another daughter. She was in love." She bit her lip. "In a way...if I were a mare...I would...love you."

The dragon was intrigued. "What's her story?"

Applejack hung her head. "There's no story, my lord. She never told him. She kept her feelings hidden, because she knew if she told him, it would destroy his chances of happiness. So she destroyed her own happiness instead."

Spike took a step toward her. "What happened to her?"

Applejack looked up and met his eyes. "She got lost at sea."

Everything she said was true. Although she had disguised it as the story of her nonexistent sister, she was professing her undying love for the dragon before her. This was as close as she was ever going to get to telling him everything.

"Somewhere out there," she continued, "is a mare who will love you with that much passion. But you'll never find her if you go through

with this. And I'm not leavin' without you."

She held out her hoof, her eyes pleading for him to come to her, insisting that she needed him like apple trees needed water, that the world would be a dreary place if he was not in it. She loved him more than life itself.

They held gaze for a very long time, until Spike raced towards her and flung his tiny arms around her. Applejack clutched him tight as he buried his face in her chest and sobbed. He was like a child, looking to his mother for comfort. For the first time, Applejack felt like he did trust her to be showing this side of himself to her. Now she saw him for what he was: not a cold, hopelessly romantic duke, but a scared boy just desperate for love and happiness.

Well, he was fifteen, so not that much a boy.

She pulled him tighter, not ever wanting to let him go, for fear he would disappear if she did. Even if they were struck by lightning at that moment, she would not be torn from him. As she held him, she knew for sure that no matter how hard she tried to suppress it, no matter how hard she tried to forget it, there was no doubt that she was deeply and unconditionally in love with the Duke.

"Don't leave me," he whispered.

Applejack smiled as she stroked the spines on his head.

"Never."

Okay, so the Duke didn't try to kill himself during Viola's confession in the play. I just thought it would be more dramatic, and emotional.

I had to put Scootaloo in there somewhere. Button was a last-minute addition. I've sort of become a ButtonBelle/SweetieMash shipper.

Midnight Plotting

Two snow days in a row! Woo hoo!

The chime of the clock echoed throughout Lady Rarity's mansion as it struck twelve. Rainbow Dash peered through the window and glanced about the empty kitchen. Then flew through and motioned for Soarin to follow. The light blue pegasus got stuck midway.

"Rainbow!" he whispered, trying to tug himself free. "A little help?"

Rainbow rolled his eyes and turned to help his friend. "This is what you get for eating all those apple pies!"

"I'm not fat! This window's just so tiny!"

"Yeah, whatever."

Rainbow grabbed Soarin's hooves and pulled with all his might. Soarin cried out in pain.

"Not so hard!"

"Do you wanna get out or not?"

He kept pulling until Soarin popped out of the window. They both cried out as they fell to the floor.

"Hi!"

They screeched again and looked up to see Pinkie Pie standing over them.

"You do know the front door's unlocked, right?"

Rainbow glared at Soarin.

"What?" the light blue pegasus said. "The window was *your* idea."

Discord materialized in front of them. "Oh! I see you all got my note! Wonderful!"

"What's this all about?" Rainbow asked as he and Soarin rose to their hooves.

"It's late at night, my nieces and that Cranky Doodle Donkey are asleep, and you know what that means!"

He snapped his fingers and confetti burst from nowhere, accompanied by the sound of a horn. Pinkie Pie squealed in excitement

"PARTY!"

"Awesome!" Soarin cried.

"Wait," Rainbow said. "What if some pony hears us?"

"They can join in the party!" Discord exclaimed, making a milk carton appear in his claw. "Who wants chocolate milk?"

"Ooh!" Pinkie chimed, raising her hoof. "Me, me, me!"

"What are we even celebrating?" Rainbow inquired.

"Why," Discord chuckled, "Sir Soarin, for winning his first tournament!"

"Woo hoo!" Soarin cheered.

"I don't know," Rainbow said skeptically. "What if Lady Rarity catches us, or Fluttershy, or even worse, Cranky?"

"Oh, they can go shake their ears!" Discord huffed, taking a sip of his chocolate milk. "Pinkie Pie, why don't you sing us a song?"

"Gladly!" Pinkie exclaimed, hopping onto the wooden table. "What will it be? A love song? A sad song? A cheerful song?"

"We're all in merry spirits tonight, so sing something cheerful!"

"I know just the one!"

She cleared her throat and began to sing:

" *'Cuz I love to make you smile, smile, smile!*

Yes, I do!

It fills my heart with sunshine all the while!

Yes, it does!

'Cuz all I really need's a smile, smile, smile!

From these happy friends of mine! "

"Pick up the tempo!" Discord insisted. "You're putting me to sleep here!"

Pinkie Pie sang the verse again, only faster. Soarin accompanied her by tapping a wooden spoon on a pot. Rainbow joined in by banging two frying pans together. Discord put his lion arm around the pink pony and sang along with her:

"' *Cuz all I really need's a smile, smile, smile!*

From these happy friends of... "

"What is going on in here?!"

Pinkie, Soarin and Rainbow Dash froze at the sight of Fluttershy in the doorway. Discord, however, smiled brightly and opened his arms.

"Fluttershy, dear! Come on in! Join the party!"

Fluttershy glanced at the glass in his claw. "Have you been drinking chocolate milk again? Discord, you know that stuff makes you eccentric!"

"As if he wasn't eccentric already," Rainbow Dash mumbled.

"Oh, don't be such a drag, my dear!" Discord exclaimed. "Have some fun!"

She squealed as the draconequus suddenly grabbed her hoof, pulled her in, set his paw on her waist and spun her around as he sang:

" *Oh my darling, oh my darling, oh my darling Fluttershy! Come and join us in our party! Don't be boring, Fluttershy!* "

Fluttershy narrowed her eyes at him as she pried herself from his arms.

"If my lady hears you, she'll have you kicked out for sure!"

"She'll have to kick me hard then!" Discord laughed. "I have a big bottom!"

"Discord, please! I could hear you all the way from upstairs! And Cranky sleeps on this floor..."

"Why? Doesn't he have a bed?"

He clutched his stomach as he fell on the floor laughing. Pinkie shortly joined him.

"Shush!" Fluttershy demanded. "You mustn't wake..."

" *Wake up! Wake up!* " Pinkie sang.

" *Every pony everywhere!* " Discord sang with her.

"Oh, for the love of...!" Fluttershy cried.

" *Love!* " Discord sang, pulling the yellow pegasus in for another dance. " *Was made for me and you!* "

"Discord, stop!"

" *Stop! In the name of love!* "

"You're going to get us all in trouble!"

" *I knew you were trouble when you walked in!* " Pinkie sang.

"You're not helping, Pinkie!"

" *You're not helping, Pinkie!* "

"Is that even a song?" Rainbow asked.

"It could be!"

Fluttershy let out a growl as she wrenched herself out of Discord's hold. "That does it! Go to your room, Discord! Now!"

He chuckled and grabbed her once again. "I do love it when you're hostile!"

"Discord!" Fluttershy screamed.

" *I'm howlin' at the moon!* " Pinkie sang. " *And sleepin' in the middle of a summer afternoon!* "

"Pinkie!"

" *And the Brain, Brain, Brain, Brain, Brain!* Narf!"

"Soarin, Rainbow, stop them!"

The two knights were rolling on the floor in laughter.

"Sorry, Fluttershy!" Rainbow wheezed. "But this is too entertaining!"

Pinkie stood on her hind legs and tapped her hooves on the table.

" *Something familiar,*

Something peculiar,

Something for every pony

A comedy toni- "

"What's all this racket?!"

Every pony went silent at the sound of Cranky's voice. They turned to see the donkey in his nightgown and cap. His head was covered in whipped cream!

"And who is responsible for *this* ?!" he demanded, pointing to his head.

Pinkie Pie snorted and Discord laughed as he bumped his fist with her hoof. Rainbow and Soarin broke into tears at the hilarious sight. Even Fluttershy found it amusing and failed to suppress her giggle.

"For goodness sake!" Cranky exclaimed. "It's the middle of the night and you're making enough noise to wake up all of Illyrimane!"

"Oh," Discord huffed. "Don't be so cranky, Doodle!"

He snickered and Pinkie hopped in front of the donkey.

" *You're a Cranky Doodle Donkey guy!* " she sang, dancing around him.

"Pinkie, please!" Fluttershy begged.

" *A Cranky Doodle Donkey! Your ears are so big, so you could hear us! Now come and join the party!* "

Cranky growled. "Idiots!"

"I know you are, but what am I?" Discord taunted.

"When my lady hears about this, she won't hesitate to throw you out!"

"Tattletale!" Soarin shouted.

"You may be her relative, Discord, but she won't approve of this behavior!"

"Won't approve of *my* behavior?" Discord said, putting his paw to his chest. "You're the one who's acting like a goody-four-shoes!"

"At least I don't go about causing chaos and pulling childish pranks!" Cranky turned to Fluttershy. "And you! I would've never expected you to stoop to their level! I assure you, Lady Rarity will hear about this! If you continue to be a part of this foolishness, you'll be thrown out along with them!"

Discord's smile faded as Cranky raised his voice at Fluttershy. He could see the tears forming in her eyes. The draconequus gripped his paw in fury. He could take Cranky's criticisms, but how dare he threaten dear, sweet Fluttershy like that?!

He raised his fist, only for Rainbow Dash to quickly grab it.

"If this happens again," Cranky said, addressing all of them now, "it will be your last night in this house!"

The donkey left in a huff and for a long while, the five of them just stood there in silence.

"Ooh!" Discord grunted. "That's the last straw! I'm turning that jerk into an orange! No! An acorn! And I'll feed him to the squirrels!"

"No!" Rainbow Dash said, hastily stopping his talons from snapping. "If you get rid of Cranky like that, Lady Rarity will definitely kick you out!"

"Yeah!" Pinkie agreed. "Mean-meanie-pants as he is, he's Rarity's chief advisor!"

"I'll challenge him to a duel!" Soarin proclaimed. "And cut him to pieces!"

"Better idea," said Rainbow. "Challenge him to a duel, and then not show up! That'll make him look like an idiot!"

"You're right," Discord said, stroking his beard in thought. "Destroying him would be too merciful. We have to humiliate him in a way that even Rarity will think he's an idiot! But how?"

"You could turn his head into a chicken's!" Pinkie suggested.

"No! She'll know I did it! We have to come up with something sneaky."

Even Fluttershy had the desire to see Cranky humiliated. She did not like the way he treated Discord, and she certainly had not liked the way he had yelled at her. She could not resist hatching a plan of her own to get revenge at the donkey. Then she remembered

catching a glimpse of his bright lime green stockings as he had left the kitchen.

"Let's dump a bucket of oil on him!" Rainbow exclaimed.

"Too amateur," Discord said.

"Um..." Fluttershy stammered. "I...I have an idea."

"Let's put a whoopee cushion in his chair!" Pinkie cried, giving one of her whoopee cushions a squeeze.

"I have an idea."

"Too childish," said Discord.

"How about we put a banana in his ear?"

Every pony, even Pinkie Pie, sent Soarin a funny look.

"What?" the light blue pegasus shrugged. "He'd look stupid."

Fluttershy lost her patience and shouted. "I *said* I have an idea!"

They all stared at her for a moment, until Discord broke into laughter.

"Oh, Fluttershy, you're so cute!" he teased, patting her on the head. "But leave this to the professionals."

"I do!" Fluttershy insisted. "I have an idea to get back at Cranky!"

"Well, then by all means, let's hear it!"

She did not like his mocking tone, but at least he was listening. Fluttershy seated herself at the table and motioned for everyone to join her.

"There are things you don't know about Cranky," she said in a low voice. "Sometimes, when he thinks he's alone, he fantasizes being married to Lady Rarity and becoming master of the house."

"What?!" Discord growled, slamming his fist on the table. "Married to

my niece?! Not if I can help it!"

"I'm afraid it's true. He thinks my lady will grow so fond of him that she'll make him her husband."

"Blech!" Pinkie said, sticking out her tongue. "But he's so old!"

"And so bossy!" Rainbow Dash exclaimed.

"And so donkey!" Soarin shouted.

"I think it would be a terrible match too," Fluttershy said with a nod. "But we'll use this against him." She gestured for them to lean in closer. "Suppose he were to find a letter from Lady Rarity? And suppose it said a few...flattering things about him?"

"You mean like a love letter?" Rainbow Dash asked.

"Yuck!" Pinkie gagged. "Why would Rarity write a love letter to Cranky?"

"It won't really be from my lady," Fluttershy explained. "It will be from me."

Soarin gasped. "You're in love with Cranky?!"

He cried out as Rainbow knocked him upside the head.

"No," Fluttershy replied. "You see, I can write a lot like my lady. We can't tell the difference between each other's hoofwriting."

Discord's eyes widened. "You mean...?"

Fluttershy nodded, which made Discord smile in delight.

"Cranky will find this letter, think it's from my niece and that she's hopelessly in love with him!"

"That's the idea!" Fluttershy exclaimed.

Discord let out a cry of excitement as he grabbed Fluttershy by the waist and spun her around.

"Oh, ho, ho! You little vixen, you! It's brilliant! Absolutely brilliant!"

He paused as his red and yellow eyes locked with her teal ones. He found himself gazing into them. Had they always sparkled like that?

Fluttershy's heart beat wildly as Discord stared into her soul. Was this how others felt when she used her Stare on them? She could feel his strong, yet tender hold on her and had never realized how right she felt in his arms, until now.

The others watched the two in confusion.

"Uh..." Rainbow Dash uttered. "So are we going with this plan or not?"

"Huh?" Discord said. "Oh! Yes, of course! Fluttershy, you'll write this letter, and tomorrow, we'll get a laugh!"

Fluttershy giggled as she gently lifted his paw and claw away from her. "Yes, tomorrow. But for now, goodnight."

She flashed him a smile as she exited the kitchen.

"Goodnight, you amazing mare, you," Discord whispered.

"Gee," Rainbow Dash marveled. "Who knew Fluttershy had it in her?"

"I know! I never thought she could be so...devious! She's...she's intoxicating!"

"Ooh!" Pinkie Pie squealed. "Some pony's in love with Fluttershy!"

"What?" Discord said, snapping out of his trance. "I am not!"

"You *so* are!" Rainbow Dash chuckled.

"Fluttershy and Discord, sitting in a tree!" Soarin chanted.

"K-I-S-S-I-N-G!" the three of them said together.

"Oh, grow up!" Discord snapped. "And go home, you rascals!" He smiled mischievously. "We have a big day tomorrow."

There she was, the pony of his dreams. She stood in front of him, yet she seemed so far away. Her white coat glistened in the sunlight, her purple mane shimmered as she tossed her head to one side, and her sapphire blue eyes sparkled as her long lashes fell gently over them.

She beckoned him closer. He could not resist. He raced to his lady and flung his arms around her. She returned his embrace, her soft hooves stroking the top of his head and along the spines of his back.

Suddenly, he felt a drop of water on his neck. Then another, then another. Rain was pouring down on them. He shivered in the cold and his lady pulled him closer. He felt warm. He felt safe.

"Don't worry, Spike," she whispered. "I'll never leave you."

Spike opened his eyes in confusion. That was not the Lady Rarity's voice. It had a different accent. This voice was shrill, with a tint of masculinity. Its tone was gentle and affectionate.

He looked up at the mare that held him. Instead of white, he saw orange with specks of yellow. Surrounding that orange were not waves of silk, but strands of straw. The eyes he met were not sapphires, but emeralds.

The new face smiled down at him, promising him protection and love. Its features were rough, yet there was a certain rustic charm about it. Even in the rain, the face radiated with beauty. Everything about this mare felt natural: the simple way she looked, the tender way she held him, the doting way she smiled at him.

He found he could not take his eyes off this beautiful face.

Then he felt the wet clothes that clung to the pony's body and he looked down to see they were that of a stallion's.

Spike let out a gasp as he sat up in bed. He glanced around, seeing he was alone. His body was sweating and his heart was racing inside his chest.

It only been a dream, but it still worried him, for he did a double-take on that face he had seen. It had not been a mare's face, but Applejack's.

All song lyrics belong to their respective owners.

Happy Hearts and Hooves Day every pony!

A Knot Too Hard to Untie

Yes, it has been a while, but it's been a crazy month.

As Spike woke, it took him a long while to notice Applejack sleeping in a chair beside his bed. Had he been there all night? He had not remembered him staying after helping him to bed.

The Duke leaned over and nudged the pagecolt.

"Applejack?" he called softly.

Applejack jumped as she came out of her slumber.

"Huh? Wha...? Oh, my lord. Pardon, I only came to see how you were doin'."

After his suicide attempt, Applejack could not rest without knowing that her master was safe. So she came to his room to find him sleeping, and could not resist staying and watching him in his peaceful state. She must have fallen asleep herself.

"It's all..."

Spike was cut off as he sneezed.

"Oh my," Applejack said. "Looks like ya caught a cold from the rain. I'll get ya some tea."

"Have you been here all night?" Spike finally asked.

"Only half the night, my lord. Don't worry, I'll be right back."

She was about to rise from the chair when he grabbed her shoulder.

"Thank you for being there for me last night," he said with a smile, "and for that, I'm giving you the day off."

"There's no need for that, my lord," Applejack assured him. "I'm much obliged to stay with you for as long as ya need me."

"No, I insist. I mean have you had a break since you came here?"

"I don't mind, my lord."

"Well, I do. Take the day off, go into town, enjoy yourself!"

"I'd rather stay, my lord. After all, you almost..."

She could not say it.

"I'll be fine," Spike assured her, "as long as I know that I have a friend like you who cares for me."

Applejack glanced down as he touched her hoof. Spike followed her gaze and quickly retracted his claw at the memory of last night's dream. That was the real reason he wanted Applejack gone. He needed time to get over the sensations of that dream. Being around Applejack so soon after made him feel awkward.

"Well, okay," Applejack said. "But I still think you need some pony to watch over you. I'll go get yerr sister."

Spike crossed his arms and pouted. "Oh, so now that you know my age, you're going to treat me like a child, huh?"

The disguised mare snickered. "Only if you keep acting like one."

"This doesn't change anything! I'm still your master!"

"In more ways than one," she mumbled.

Applejack took one long, last look at the dragon before she shut his bedroom door. She really did not want to leave him, but she had business to attend to with the Lady Rarity.

Meanwhile, back at Lady Rarity's estate, Fluttershy was ushering Discord, Soarin and Rainbow Dash into the bushes.

"Hurry!" she whispered. "He's coming this way!"

"Where's Pinkie Pie?" Soarin inquired.

"Probably late, as usual," Rainbow groaned.

"Too bad she'll miss this," Discord said with a chuckle. "This is going to be great!"

"Just remember to be quiet!" Fluttershy exclaimed.

"Aren't you going to stay and watch?" Rainbow asked.

"It's best that I don't. If I get caught in this, my lady will surely fire me!"

"She's got a point," Soarin said. "I mean we get in trouble all the time, but Fluttershy here has a reputation to uphold."

"And Cranky will come down on her the hardest," Discord sighed. "Very well, Fluttershy. You don't have to hide with us if you don't want to."

"Shush!" Fluttershy whispered harshly. "I hear him coming!"

The trio laughed as their heads lowered into the bushes. Fluttershy glanced around and dropped an envelope in front of their hiding place and then casually trotted away.

"Move over!" Rainbow whispered. "Your elbow's in my side!"

"Well, your wing is touching my tail!" Soarin replied, gritting his teeth.

"You're such a baby! Ow! And get your wing out of my eye!"

"Only when you let go of my hoof!"

"I'm not touching your hoof!"

"If you're not touching my hoof, then who's...?"

"Hi!"

All three of them shrieked and looked behind them to see Pinkie Pie.

"Stop doing that!" Rainbow exclaimed.

"Sorry I'm late!" Pinkie apologized. "Did I miss anything?"

"He hasn't even come yet," Discord replied. "He should be here any minute. Now keep quiet!"

They all lowered their heads as the donkey came up the walkway. He was mumbling to himself.

"What's he saying?" Pinkie whispered.

"Hush!" Discord pleaded, making his ear bigger so he could hear.

"Why, Rarity," Cranky said in a shocked tone. "This...this is so sudden and...you think it proper? A noblemare and a lowly servant?"

The four eavesdroppers tried their best not to laugh.

"Well, I suppose it's not unheard of. After all, Princess Cadence just married her Captain of the Guard. Oh, but I'm so much older... You don't mind? Well, neither do I."

Cranky paused and looked up at the sky. "Lord Cranky. Has a nice ring to it, don't you think?"

"No," Rainbow snickered.

The donkey did not seem to hear him, so he carried on. "But if we are to be married, we must get rid of that ridiculous uncle of yours."

"What?" Discord gasped.

"Unless he stops his fooling around and inviting those idiotic knights..."

"He's talking about us, isn't he?" Soarin whispered to Rainbow.

"Sirs Soarin and Rainbow Dash."

"I knew it!"

"And most importantly, he should stop...fooling around with the staff."

"What?!" Discord nearly shouted. "I'm going to kill him!"

"Quiet!" Rainbow exclaimed as he and Soarin held the draconequus back. "He'll hear you!"

"But the very idea! I would never..."

"What's this?" Cranky said, kneeling down to pick Fluttershy's letter off the ground.

"Shush!" Pinkie whispered. "He's found the letter!"

"Let's hope he buys it!" Soarin chuckled.

Cranky curiously examined the envelope. He then turned it over to see who it was addressed to.

" *To my unknown special some pony* ..." he read and then let out a gasp. "This is Lady Rarity's writing! These are her P's, her L's, her O's and her T's!"

Discord, Pinkie and Rainbow snickered while Soarin scrunched his nose in confusion.

"P's, L's, O's and T's? Why focus on that?"

"This is her seal!" Cranky exclaimed. "With the picture of a gem! And this is her stationary! Who's this unknown special some pony?"

The donkey hastily opened the letter and read its contents:

" *My dearest CDD* ..." He paused. "CDD! Cranky Doodle Donkey! Those are my initials! This letter is for me! She wrote a letter to me!"

"Okay, we get it!" Rainbow grumbled. "Read the dumb letter already!"

" *If thou should happen to stumble upon this, thou must not know who I am.* This is exactly what my lady would say! *I adore thee with*

all my heart, that which I entrust to you. 'Tis why I rejected every suitor who came to call, for my affections are bestowed upon thee and only thee. Yet I am afraid, for I am above thee in station, but if thou shalt have me, let it be. Be not afraid of greatness, my love. Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them. "

"Ooh," Discord chuckled in delight. "He's caught hook, line and sinker!"

" *Though thou art gloomy in appearance. I do wish to see thee smile, and see thee wearing thine charming lime green stockings and wearing a* ..."

He trailed off and his spies waited in anticipation.

"What?" Pinkie pleaded. "Wearing what? WHAT?!"

Cranky turned around and the others covered Pinkie's mouth. The donkey shrugged and returned to the letter.

" *And since I hope that thou wilt be my husband, look down on the other servants and my uncle, for thou art above them all. Do all these things and I shalt know that thou lovest me as I do thee. Forever yours, the Lady of your Heart* ."

Cranky let out a cry of happiness and clutched the letter to his heart. "She loves me! My lady loves me! Oh, yes! I will do all these things she asks of me! I will smile! I will be cheerful and look down on the riffraff!"

He then paused and the four eavesdroppers watched as his lip quivered. It looked as if he was going to cry, until his lips curled upwards. Pinkie Pie's eyes widened as she was about to witness what she had thought impossible.

Cranky smiled.

What he did afterwards was even more unexpected. He jumped up and kicked his back hooves together. Then he started laughing and danced down the path. As soon as he was out of sight, the four of them released the laughter they had been holding back.

"That...was...awesome!" Rainbow cried.

"Fluttershy not only made a fool out of him," Pinkie exclaimed, "but she got him to smile!"

"Oh, I could marry that mare!" Discord declared.

"So could I!" Soarin cried, raising his hoof.

"Even me!" Pinkie giggled. "Even if it's not legal in this period!"

Rainbow Dash cringed. "Err...I'm fine being single."

"Oh, we have to go find her and praise her for this ingenious prank!" Discord exclaimed.

The entire time, Fluttershy had been sitting on a stone bench with a book open in front of her. She squealed in surprise as Discord suddenly appeared.

"You!" he cried.

Fluttershy blushed as the draconequus knelt down and kissed her hooves.

"You brilliant..." he said between kisses, "devious...exquisite mare, you!"

"So it worked?" Fluttershy inquired.

"Did it work? You sprang the trap and snapped his spine!"

"Yeah!" Soarin shouted as he and the others came up to her. "You should've seen him! He was all...cheerful!"

"And ridiculous!" Rainbow laughed. "He totally thought the letter was from Rarity!"

"And he smiled!" Pinkie shrieked. "I've been trying to get him to smile for years, and he smiled!"

"Now he'll be acting so stupid, Lady Rarity will think he's crazy!"

"That's the idea," Fluttershy said.

"Though what was with the lime green stockings?" Soarin asked.

"Well, Lady Rarity absolute abhors the color lime green, especially with Cranky's shade of brown."

"But what was that other thing you told him to wear?" Pinkie inquired. "He didn't say that part!"

"Oh, I told him to wear a..."

"Excuse me?"

Every pony turned around to see the Duke Spike's pagecolt standing in front of them. Discord crossed his arms.

"Oh, it's *you* again."

"Is Lady Rarity within?" Applejack asked.

"Uh, who are you?" Soarin inquired.

"I'm Applejack. I'm here on behalf of the Duke Spike..."

"Get lost," Rainbow huffed, flying into the pagecolt's face. "Hasn't any pony told you that Rarity doesn't want anything to do with the Duke?"

"Yeah!" Soarin nodded. "She's marrying me!"

Applejack raised an eyebrow at the knight. "Really?"

"Yeah! Why is that a surprise to you?"

"Look, I must speak with the Lady Rarity. It's very important!"

"Well, she's not seeing any pony today," Fluttershy said.

"On the contrary..."

Every pony turned their heads again. This time, it was the Lady Rarity walking up to them.

"If this young colt requests my audience," she said, holding her head high, "I am obliged to grant it to him."

"But..." Soarin started to say.

"Leave us."

Her commanding tone made them all shrink and they did as they were told. Once they were gone, Rarity turned to smile at the handsome pagecolt.

"Dear Applejack," she said, taking his hoof, "it is a pleasure to see you again."

Applejack glanced down at the white hoof, not liking it there, and pulled hers away. Rarity frowned at this gesture.

"Unless, of course" she said coldly, "you're only here because your master sent you."

"Actually, madam," Applejack said, "my master doesn't know I'm here."

"Oh!" the unicorn cried, her face lighting up. "Well, in that case..."

"But I did come to discuss him. Ya see, last night, he tried to..."

"UGH!"

Applejack jumped back as the lady screamed.

"Him! It's always *him* ! The Duke this, the Duke that! Oh Celestia, why don't you ever come just for *me* ?!"

"Madam, I don't..."

"I saw you holding hooves with the Lady Twilight! What does she have that I don't?! Am I not pretty enough for you?"

Applejack backed away as Rarity stepped toward her.

"My lady, I..."

"Is my hair too curly?!"

"Your hair is fine, but..."

"Do I bore you?!"

"Madam, what has come over you?!"

"Oh, Applejack! Are you really that blind?! Can't you see that it's you I want and not the Duke?! I thought inviting him to the tournament would make you jealous, but I saw you were occupied with other matters!"

"W-wha...?"

Applejack soon found herself pressed against a tree, the unicorn only inches away from her face.

"Oh, I can't hide it anymore, Applejack!" Rarity cried, trapping the pagecolt with her hooves. "By all the gems in the world, by honor, truth and everything, I love you so!"

Applejack felt sick to the stomach as she learned her suspicions had been correct.

"My lady..."

"I know I may seem bold," the unicorn said, taking hold of the pagecolt's shirt, "but don't think it a bad thing! I know you didn't ask for this, but isn't it better to receive love without asking for it?"

"Get your hooves off me, you crazy mare!" Applejack shouted as she angrily shoved the unicorn away.

Rarity only sighed. "Oh, you're even handsome when you're angry!"

"Look! You're a nice mare and all, but you're just not my type!"

"How can I not be your type? I'm *every* pony's type!"

"Trust me, you're not!"

The unicorn grunted. "It's that confounded purple unicorn, isn't it?! I

should've known! Servants fall for their mistresses all the time!"

"Listen! My heart belongs to no mare! No pony, for that matter! It never has and it never will!"

Applejack huffed as she began stomping away. "Good day to ya! I won't come and bother you about my master ever again!"

"Then come just to see me!" Rarity called. "You'll learn to like me! You'll see!"

The disguised mare was so appalled, her march turned into a run. She wanted to get as far away from that insane mare as possible.

Applejack could not believe what she had gotten herself into! Her disguise had worked all too well! She was such a good stallion that she had gotten a mare to fall for her! Not just any mare, but the one her master was in love with! That poor lady. If she were ever to find out the truth, she might as well be in love with a dream!

Before she knew it, Applejack had reached the Duke's estate and she her first instinct was to run for her room. Applebloom was there, mending a dress. She looked up as her sister burst in.

"What's wrong?"

Applejack collapsed beside her sister and gazed up at the bed above her.

"Oh, little sister," she gasped. "I've just weaved a web of chaos with my lies! We should've never come here, Applebloom!"

"What are you talking about?"

"We have to leave, before things get even more out of hoof!"

"What?"

"We have plenty of money now! It might not be enough to get us back to Haystings, but we could get as far as Trottingham!"

"But why, sis?"

"Because...because..."

Applebloom put her needlework to the side and crawled up to her sister. "Come on. Tell me."

Applejack took a deep breath before shouting, "The Lady Rarity's in love with me!"

The filly's eyes widened. "What?! How is that possible? You're a mare! Mares don't fall in love with other mares!"

The older sibling smiled at the younger and patted her head. "Sure they don't, Sugar Cube. But she thinks I'm a stallion! It's the craziest thing ever! Spike is in love with Rarity, but she, greatly mistaken, is in love with me, and I, the stupid mare that I am, would die a thousand deaths for Spike!"

Applebloom gasped. "I knew it! I knew it!"

"But it can't ever happen! Every pony thinks I'm a stallion!"

"Then show them you're not! When Lady Rarity sees you're a mare, she'll leave you alone, and the Duke will fall in love with ya, marry ya and y'all can live happily ever after!"

Applejack grunted and sat up. "It doesn't work like that, Applebloom! If I reveal myself, Spike will fire me! Even if I do tell him how I feel, he won't care, because he loves Rarity. He'll kick us both out and we'll be beggars! Do ya want that, Applebloom?"

"Maybe it won't happen that way. Even if the Duke doesn't love you back, maybe he'll help us get home."

"I can't take that chance, Applebloom," Applejack said, taking her sister's hooves. "I promised Mother I'd take care of ya. I can't do that if we're out on the streets."

"I don't care. The Duke needs to know how you feel. More importantly, he needs to know you're not a..."

She trailed off as her eyes widened.

"What is it, Sugar?" Applejack asked, following her sister's gaze.

She was silent as she caught sight of their mistress standing frozen in the doorway, her shocked expression matching theirs. For a while, all they did was stare at each other, neither of them saying anything or even knowing what to say. What could they say? Twilight had overheard the conversation. Silence was expected. It was Twilight who decided to break it.

"Is it true?" she asked in a choked voice.

Applejack glanced between her sister and her mistress and sighed in defeat. "Yes, my lady."

"You...you were a mare...all this time?"

Applejack nodded.

"Who...who are you then?"

The disguised mare sighed. "My name is Lady Applejacqueline of Haystings. Applebloom has the same title. We were shipwrecked here with not enough money to get us back home." She pulled her sister into an embrace. "I had to provide for my sister, but as you well may know, there aren't many opportunities for mares."

"So you made yourself a stallion," Twilight concluded.

"You know the rest."

The unicorn approached the sisters cautiously. "And...the Lady Rarity's in love with you?"

Applejack smirked. "She thinks she is, anyway."

"And...you're in love with my brother?"

This made her blush. "I...I didn't mean to..."

Twilight giggled. "It's okay. No pony plans for these things to happen."

The two sisters chuckled along with her, glad that the awkwardness between them had dissolved. Twilight sat beside them.

"After all, I didn't expect to find love with Flash."

"Why do you not tell your brother about that?" Applejack could not help but ask.

"Well, it's not because of our stations or anything, but Spike has enough problems to deal with. I can't leave him when he's in this state, especially after he..."

She paused, not wanting to say it.

"Ya see why I have to get him with the Lady Rarity?" Applejack said. "He might try again, and...I can't bear to let that happen!"

"Because you love him," Twilight murmurred.

The poor mare buried her face in her hooves. "Yeah. I'm a monster, ain't I?"

"No. You're just in love." The unicorn took the earth pony's hooves in her own. "And frankly, I don't think Rarity is right for my brother. In fact, I can't think of any pony better suited to marry him than you."

Applejack smiled as tears of hope formed in her eyes. "Really?"

"Yeah. I mean you care for him, and he dotes as much on you, though he doesn't realize it because of your disguise. You're patient with him, you put his welfare above your own, and you saved his life!"

"That's very kind of you to say, Twilight, but...even if I do tell him the truth, what if he doesn't love me back?"

"Why wouldn't he? Even if he doesn't, I'll make sure he's not hard on you. We'll get you home, or even let you stay here if you'd like."

"I appreciate that, Twi, but...if Spike does know the truth, I'd rather he hear it from me."

Twilight nodded. "I understand, but I mean it when I say you'd be the perfect match for him." She giggled. "It's funny. When we were kids, Father wanted the two of us to get married someday, since we weren't really siblings. He wanted to keep Spike in the family."

"Why didn't you?"

The unicorn shrugged. "We weren't compatible. I love Spike more as a brother than a lover, and he loves me as a sister. So I won't leave him until he has found some pony who can take care of him for me."

Applejack blushed as Twilight hinted at her with her raised eyebrows.

"Don't worry," she assured them both. "Your secret is safe with me."

"Thank ya, Twilight," Applejack said, throwing her hooves around her friend.

Big Macintosh stared at his reflection in the mirror. Trixie's failed healing spell had brightened the hue in his coat and mane. His coat was orange and his hair was the color of straw. If he were shorter, he would be a spitting image of Applejacqueline.

The thought of his deceased sister made a tear fall from his eye.

"Again, I'm really sorry," Trixie said, her head appearing in the mirror. "I thought it would've worn off by now." She carefully removed the bandage from his head. "Your wounds have healed anyway."

"Eeyup," Big Macintosh said, feeling the much smaller bump on his head. "Which means I should be off."

Trixie's face fell as the stallion took a sack off the rack and went to pack Trixie's father's old clothes that she had lent to him.

"You're leaving?" she asked, rushing up to him. "So soon?"

"Eeyup," Big Mac replied.

"Can't you stay another night? Just to make sure your head is completely healed?"

"Nope. I have to get back home. I'll have to get some money first though so I can make the voyage."

"Then let me go with you!" Trixie pleaded, laying her hoof on his.

"Nope," Big Mac said, taking his hoof away. "It's best I go alone. I've had so much bad luck, I don't want to get you roped into it."

"Where will you even go? You're a stranger in this country! I can help!"

"Trixie..."

The blue unicorn blushed deeply as he laid his hoof on her shoulder.

"You've done so much for me already. I'd hate to ask you for more."

"I don't care!" Trixie insisted. "I want to go with you! I...I care about you a lot."

Big Macintosh sighed. "Because you have been my friend, you should know that my name is Macintosh of Haystings."

Trixie gasped as she recognized the name. "You're...you're a duke?"

"Eeyup. Big Mac was what my sisters called me. They both drowned in the wreck." He sniffed as tears formed in his eyes. "Applebloom was so young, so sweet. She would've blossomed into a beautiful mare. And Applejacqueline," he shook his head with a grin, "she sure was somethin'. Stubborn, rebellious... And to think, I was going to force her to marry a stallion she didn't love. The last words we said to each other were filled with anger. We...we never had a chance to apologize..."

Trixie looked at the stallion sympathetically and used her magic to lift a handkerchief to his face. Big Mac nodded in thanks and blew into the cloth.

"I'm sorry if I wasn't a better host," Trixie said.

"Nope," Big Mac sniffed. "I'm grateful that you saved my life. You're right. I need to live for my sisters. I need to get back to Haystings and make sure the place isn't in chaos."

"How will you get there? Haystings is all the way across the sea."

"I will go to the Duke Spike's court and ask that he aid me. If not, I'll ask him to employ me."

Big Mac finished gathering his clothes and then turned to embrace his friend. "Thank ya, Trixie. I will never forget ya."

Trixie blinked away the shameful tears that were developing in her eyes. "I won't forget you."

He pulled away and smiled warmly. "Farewell."

She gulped. "Farewell."

Trixie watched in sadness as the stallion walked out the door. Then she collapsed on the bed and allowed the tears to flow. She wanted to follow him, but if she entered Illyrimane, she would be arrested on the spot.

She had grown fond of her patient over the past few weeks. Not only was he handsome, but sweet and gentle, despite his masculine physique. Even though he did not talk much of his past, she had enjoyed their small talk. She had not had company since her exile, and nothing had made her smile before Big Mac.

It had not taken long for her to fall for him.

Yet she knew deep within her heart that as soon as he was better, he would have to leave. He had a home somewhere and, even if his sisters were gone, he must have a family.

He had made it clear he did not want her to follow him, and she would get in trouble if she did.

She wiped away her tears and turned to look at the door.

"Oh, to hell with it!" she exclaimed, standing up. "I don't care if I risk

execution, so long as I'm with him!"

Finally this story's moving along! Wow, I did not think I could fit so many scenes in one chapter.

Lime Green Stockings

Discord and Rainbow Dash watched as Soarin paced around the garden.

"Okay, I give up," Discord declared. "What's gotten you so upset?"

Soarin stomped his hoof. "I won't stay here any longer!"

"Why not?" Rainbow asked.

"Yesterday, I saw Rarity fawning over the Duke's servant!"

"Did she see you when you saw her?" Discord inquired.

"Yes! She walked right by me!"

"Don't you see? She's making you jealous!"

"Oh, quit it, Discord!" Rainbow shouted. "She's not interested, Soarin! I suggest you give up this foolishness and find some other..."

"Play along and we'll have some fun," Discord whispered in the multi-colored pegasus' ear. "What you need to do, Sir Soarin, is get the competition out of the way."

Soarin blinked. "How am I supposed to do that?"

"Challenge him to a duel! Ladies like it when stallions fight for their honor!"

The knight smiled. "Yeah. A duel! It's perfect! I'll go write the challenge right now!"

As Soarin flew off, Rainbow Dash punched the draconequus in the shoulder. "Are you nuts? He could hurt himself!"

"Trust me," Discord said, patting his friend on the back. "This will be a lot of fun, I assure you!"

The two of them turned as they heard a mare's laughter. Fluttershy was coming up the path, chortling uncontrollably and crying tears of joy.

"Now, what is this?" Discord said, putting his paw and claw on his hips. "I've never seen you laugh so hard!"

Fluttershy lost so much control that she fell over. Rainbow caught her in his hooves.

"Cranky..." Flutershy gasped, "he...he's...lime green stockings!"

Rainbow and Discord started laughing along with her.

"And..." Discord said, pointing to his head, "wearing a...?"

Fluttershy nodded and the tree of them collapsed to the ground.

"Oh...he actually..." Discord wheezed. "Show us where he is! I have to see this!"

Big Mac searched about the busy streets for an inn. He had never been to Illyrimane before, so he did not know where to find one. A part of him wished he had allowed Trixie to come along so he would not be in this predicament, but it was dangerous for her to travel with him.

He suddenly felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up. He glanced around, feeling he was being watched. Then he spied a black head duck behind a barrel as soon as he looked its way. He cautiously approached the barrel and peered behind it. Hiding there was a hooded figure. He could not see its face, but he could see the blue hooves covering it. He knelt down, moved the hooves aside and gasped.

"Trixie!" he cried, flinging his hooves around his friend.

"I'm sorry!" Trixie exclaimed. "I...I had to follow you and...see that you were alright."

Big Mac smiled sympathetically. "Well, as long as you're here, you might as well help."

Trixie smiled in return as he helped her up, though she still kept her hood up.

"What's the most affordable yet comfortable inn around here?" Big Macintosh asked his companion.

"That would be *The Sugar Cube* ," Trixie replied. "Come on, it's this way."

"Why don't we look around for a bit? It's a nice little town."

"No, we should get settled first."

"I'm not tired."

"Please, it would be best if..."

She trailed off as a pair of guards approached them. Trixie quickly pulled her hood over her face and tried not to meet their gaze as they passed by. This behavior did not escape Big Macintosh.

"Trixie, what's going on here?"

"Not here," the unicorn whispered.

She took him by the hoof and pulled him into an alley.

"I should've told you about this sooner," Trixie explained, "but I didn't know what you'd think."

"Why? What's wrong?"

"You see..." she gulped. "I can't be seen here. If I am, I'll be arrested and possibly executed!"

"Whatever for?"

Trixie glanced around to make sure no pony was listening and leaned in closer. "Have you ever heard of a unicorn named Sombra?"

The stallion nodded. "I heard that he tried to take over Illyrimane and later, Equestria, and that he used dark magic and was destroyed by the princesses..."

"Yes, well, he's..." Trixie sighed. "He was my father."

Big Macintosh gasped.

"Yes, it's true. He was an awful unicorn, he did terrible things, but I stood by him, because I was his daughter. What could I do? You must always stand by family. You understand, don't you?"

He nodded, knowing he would have done the same for his sisters.

"I did terrible things too, things I regret. I...I also used dark magic. Not just any magic, but the Alicorn Amulet! Lady Twilight Sparkle, an expert at magic, managed to defeat me in battle. When my father was destroyed, the Duke took pity on me and only sentenced me into exile."

She looked up at the stallion. "That was many years ago! I haven't used dark magic since!"

"It's okay," Big Mac said, putting his hooves on her shoulders. "The past is in the past. But if you're in so much danger here, why did you come?"

Trixie glanced down, avoiding his gaze. "I...I couldn't stay behind you."

He smiled. "Okay, but you should stay out of sight."

"We probably shouldn't be seen together either. They'll think you're an accomplice or something. I don't want you in danger."

"Maybe we should split up."

"You're right. Here." The unicorn fished into her cloak, pulled out a bag of gold and placed it in his hooves. "Here's some money. I'll go to *The Sugar Cube* , get us a room and something to eat, while you go explore the town. We'll meet at the inn in an hour."

Big Mac blinked. "Why are you giving me money?"

She shrugged. "In case you want to buy some souvenir or something."

He nodded. "Alright. I'll meet you in an hour."

"At *The Sugar Cube* !" Trixie called as he walked out of the alley.

"Eeyup!" he called back.

"So you remember what he looks like?" Rarity beseeched Pinkie.

"Uh-huh!" the jester nodded, the bells jingling from her hat. "Orange coat, blond hair, freckles, green eyes, marish face! I *never* forget a face!"

"Good. Find him and bring him back here as soon as possible. If he won't come, find ways to convince him. Can you do that for me, Pinkie?"

"You bet!"

Pinkie saluted and dashed out of the parlor. Rarity began pacing back and forth.

"Oh, what should I say to him? What can I do to impress him? How can I make him see my love for him is true and I'm just as pretty as that...that...puny purple pony?!" She paused. "Oh, I shouldn't be talking to myself!"

She opened the doors to the parlor and called, "Cranky! Oh, Cranky, where are you? Cranky!"

She heard some laughter, but instead of Cranky, she saw Fluttershy coming down the hall. She should have known, since Cranky never laughed.

"Fluttershy!" Rarity commanded. "Have you seen Cranky?"

"Oh, yes!" Fluttershy snickered. "Yes, I've seen him!"

The unicorn tilted her head, surprised at Fluttershy's mirth. "What's so funny?"

"Oh, forgive me, my lady. Cranky is...not all in his wits today."

"Why? What's the matter with him? Oh, I hope he's in enough wits to talk. The Duke's pagecolt is coming and I need someone as serious as Cranky to vent my sorrows to."

"Well...he's not quite serious today."

"What? How is he?"

The two mares jumped as laughter echoed throughout the mansion that sounded like an evil spirit haunting the place.

"Uncle Discord, is that you?" Rarity called.

"No, sweet lady!"

Her eyes widened as a lime green leg appeared round the corner. The color made Rarity want to gag. She gasped when the owner of that leg revealed himself.

"C-C-Cranky?!" she shrieked. "What are you wearing?!"

"Oh," the donkey smirked. "You mean...my fez?!"

He gestured proudly to the tall red hat on his head. Rarity cringed, as she absolutely appalled fezzes when they weren't worn by Saddlearabians.

"And how do you like my..." he shot up his leg, "lime green stockings?"

"Oh, that shade of green with that shade of brown..." Rarity muttered in abhorrence.

It was a crime against fashion!

She had never seen Cranky in such high spirits. She had never

even seen him smile, let alone wear a fez! Meanwhile, Fluttershy was trying to suppress a giggle.

"Are you alright, Cranky?" Rarity inquired.

"Alright?" the donkey repeated, jumping in the air. "I've never been better!"

"Um...perhaps you should get to bed."

Cranky gasped. "To bed, my lady? What a splendid idea!"

She shrieked as he put his hooves around her waist. "What is the matter with you?!"

"I'm doing exactly what you told me! You remember! 'Some are born great...'"

"Huh?"

"'Some achieve greatness...'"

"What are you talking about?"

"'And some have greatness thrust upon them!'"

"Goodness!" Rarity cried as she wriggled out of the donkey's embrace. "This is madness, I tell you! Madness!"

"My lady!" Rainbow Dash called as he and Discord came down the hall. "The Duke's pagecolt is at the..."

He paused when he saw Cranky and he and his friend exploded into laughter.

"Stop laughing!" Rarity commanded. "What was that you were saying about the Duke's pagecolt?"

"Huh?" Rainbow uttered. "Oh. He's at the gate, here to see you."

"Well, that was fast. Fluttershy, please, take care of this...fellow. See that he doesn't hurt any pony, especially himself. You two rascals, help her."

"Yes, my lady," Discord snickered.

They waited until the unicorn was gone before turning to Cranky.

"Now come quietly, Cranky," Discord said, slowly approaching him. "We don't want to hurt you."

"Get your filthy paw and claw off me!" the donkey cried before Discord had the chance to touch him. "You no-good, dirty scoundrel!"

Rainbow gasped. "Oh, no he didn't!"

"Scoundrel?" Discord said, placing his paw over his chest. "Well! That's a little harsh, isn't it?"

"Come, let's get you to bed, Cranky," Fluttershy said, taking the donkey's hoof.

"Unhoof me!" Cranky commanded, wrenching himself away. "And go away, you peasants! I am above all of you!"

"My, whatever makes you think that?" Discord asked, feigning ignorance.

The donkey held up his chin and turned his back to them all. "You'll understand in time."

They watched as Cranky proudly marched away in his ridiculous attire and then they all broke into laughter once again.

"I don't believe it!" Discord yelled. "I simply can't believe it!"

"If this were a play onstage," Rainbow declared, "it would be the most unrealistic thing ever!"

"What if he finds out this was all a prank?" Fluttershy asked.

"Then we'll do away with him before he says anything," Discord said.

"Oh, dear! You don't mean...?"

"No, no, nothing like that! My niece asked us to *take care* of him.

The donkey is surely mad. He must be locked up so he can't hurt any pony."

"Ooh!" Rainbow squealed. "That's *really* going to drive him nuts!"

"And the house will be much quieter."

"It seems kind of mean," Fluttershy said. "Don't you think locking him up is going a bit too far?"

"Nonsense!" Discord huffed. "He needs to be taught a lesson!"

"Guys!" Soarin called, racing up the hallway with a parchment in his hoof.

"Soarin!" Rainbow exclaimed. "You're missing out on all the fun!"

"I have the challenge! Want to read it?"

"I'll read it," Discord said, taking the paper from the knight. He summoned a pair of spectacles for effect. " *Dear Loser* ..."

"Classic," Rainbow scoffed.

" *You've been spending a lot of time with the Lady Rarity, my intended. So I challenge you to a duel. Winner gets the lady's hoof. Loser...gets Rainbow Dash.* "

"WHAT?!" Rainbow grabbed the letter. "It doesn't say that!"

"It doesn't," Discord snickered, taking the parchment back. "That was a joke. It says the loser dies. *Signed, Your Greatest Enemy. P.S. You suck.* "

They all looked at the grinning knight.

"Great, huh?"

"Uh, yeah," Rainbow uttered. "Intimidating."

"He'll be scared out of his wits!" Discord declared. "You go and sharpen your sword and we'll deliver the challenge."

"Oh, yeah!" Soarin cried, running excitedly in place. "Head in the game, head in the game!"

He dashed out of the mansion and Discord waited awhile before crumpling up the piece of paper and popping it in his mouth.

"He's a lousy writer," he said. "We'll scare that puny colt with a challenge of our own."

"But what if he's not as puny as he looks?" Rainbow asked. "Soarin might seriously get..."

"Relax. This will all be worth it."

Big Mac was pretty sure he was lost. It had been over an hour since he has parted company with Trixie and he had trouble finding *The Sugar Cube* . He had asked several ponies for directions, but he found himself going in circles.

He let out a yelp as some pony rammed into him and they both toppled to the ground.

"Hey!" Big Macintosh cried. "What's the big idea?"

He sat up to see that his attacker was a jester. A female jester, for that matter. The pink mare stood and readjusted her jingling hat.

"Sorry!" she shrieked, holding out her hoof to help him. "I'm looking for a pagecolt. He wasn't at the Duke's place like he was supposed to be, so I've been searching all over town and I can't seem to find him! Have you seen him?"

He shrugged. "What does he look like?"

"Well, he has an orange coat, kind of your shade, and a blond mane, a bit like yours, has green eyes like yours, the exact same amount of freckles on his face as yours and looks a bit marish and..."

She paused and looked over the stallion again.

"Hey!" she squealed. "Where've you been?! I've been looking everywhere for you!"

Big Mac blinked in confusion. "Huh?"

"Come on!" Pinkie commanded, taking the stallion's hoof. "Lady Rarity wants to see you!"

He narrowed his eyes and tugged his hoof away. "I'm not going anywhere with you, crazy mare!"

"Oh, I understand if you don't like Rarity much, but if she doesn't see you soon, she's gonna go nuts!"

"Sorry, you must have me confused with some pony else."

He turned to leave when the fool popped up in front of him.

"You're coming with me!" she screamed in his face. "Okay, Applejack?"

"Applejack?"

"Come on, let's go! You know how Rarity hates waiting!"

Big Mac wrenched himself out of the jester's grasp. "Leave me alone, you crazy pink horse!"

Pinkie gasped at this insult. "Excuse me?!"

But Big Macintosh did not wait for her to make a comeback and took his opportunity to run.

"Hey!" Pinkie shouted. "I'm not finished with you, mister! My lady wishes to see you! Applejack, come back here!" She continued yelling as she raced after him. "YOU CAN'T ESCAPE ME! APPLEJACK!"

Now you understand why I picked Trixie as Antonio, a person who has made mistakes in their past and is ostracized for them.

And I know it's hard to believe Big Mac could be mistaken for Applejack, even with the orange fur, but that's the best I can do. See, in the play, Sebastian and Viola are twins, so they look a lot alike.

Mistaken Identity

What do you know? The twelfth chapter of Twelfth Night! LOL!

Applejack had not wanted to return to the Lady Rarity, but she had her orders from Spike. She could not believe that after nearly losing his life over the girl, he was still intent on pursuing her. Also, despite her talk with Twilight last night, Applejack believed the best way to untie this tangled knot was to convince Rarity that Spike was the one for him.

It was not just about protecting Applebloom anymore. Applejack could not let Spike know she had lied to him and, most importantly, did not want to face rejection.

On the bright side, Rarity was less persistent today and satisfied with casual conversation. She talked about the latest fashions and her favorite pastimes. Applejack listened politely, but whenever Rarity showed interest in her, she would steer the subject to Spike. Unfortunately, the lady was quite good at avoiding topics she did not like.

After nearly an hour of speaking and walking about the garden, Rarity finally gave up.

"Your view of me has not changed at all, has it?" she said with a sigh. "I'm starting to think your heart is made of stone."

"If you really want to make me happy, my lady," Applejack said sternly, "you will forget this foolishness and go after your real love, my master."

She groaned. "Oh, him again! How can I give my heart to him when I've already given it to you?"

"I'll give it back. Or give it away if that will make you see reason!"

"Before you go, I want you to wear this for me." She used her magic to remove a silver locket around her neck and lower it into Applejack's hoof. "It has my picture inside. Don't refuse it! It will not speak to you! But perhaps you'll be reminded of the face that yearns for you."

"Madam, this is improper..."

"Just take it! And come again tomorrow."

"I only came here today on my master's behalf."

"Well, if that is the only thing that will make you come, so be it!"

"Ya know? You and the Duke are more alike than you think. You're just as crazy!"

Rarity gasped. "Well!"

She held up her head in a huff and stomped away. The sad thing was, he looked handsome even when insulting her.

"I hope you know what you're doing," Rainbow told Discord as Applejack approached them.

"Don't worry," Discord said nonchalantly. "Your boyfriend won't get hurt."

The pegasus' cheeks turned red. "What?!"

"Oh, please, I'm not an idiot."

"No, no, no, no, no. You got it all wrong. Soarin and I...we're not...he's a...and I'm a..."

"Chill," Discord winked. "I won't tell any pony your little secret."

"You don't understand. The thing is I'm..."

"I'm no traditionalist. After all, this is the seventeenth century."

Rainbow scratched his head. "Then why are we talking like it's the twentieth?"

"Here comes the pipsqueak. Now the fun begins. Aw, dear lad!"

Applejack froze at the sight of Discord. "Uh oh. Uh, look, sir, if I insulted you the other day..."

"Aw, let bygones be bygones, dear boy!" Discord exclaimed, patting the disguised mare on the back. "No hard feelings, right? Besides, it's not me you have to worry about."

She looked up at him in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"It seems, my boy, you've made quite an enemy."

"Enemy?!" Applejack choked. "What did I do?"

"Who knows? The stallion's a real devil and plans to attack you on your way home. He said, 'I shall run my sword through him and stick him in the ground and watch him wriggle until his damned soul has left him!'"

Applejack shivered at the image. "But I haven't done anything! Have I? If I did something to offend this stallion, I'm sure it was by accident!"

"Well, you're in luck, lad. Sir Soarin, though a devil he may be, is a friend of mine. Oh, don't be fooled by what you hear of his jousting matches. He is much deadlier with a rapier than he is with a lance."

"But I'm no fighter!" Applejack insisted. "Sure, I took a bit of fencin', but I wouldn't hurt a fly!"

"Fear not, my dear boy. Though it will be difficult, I'll try to convince Sir Soarin to go easy on you. I warn you though, he is a raging, furious, unforgiving creature!"

He smirked as he left Applejack quivering in her legs. Rainbow Dash flew to the draconequus' side.

"Are we talking about the same Soarin?" he whispered.

"But of course," Discord said, pulling his companion in closer. "That puny pagecolt thinks he's up against a monster. He'll be too terrified

to even draw his sword. Now I'm going to tell Sir Soarin that his adversary is the very devil."

Rainbow raised an eyebrow at the pagecolt who was searching frantically for hiding place. "Him?"

"Yes! And Soarin will be just as terrified and just as petrified." He nudged the pegasus with his elbow. "Get my drift?"

Rainbow paused and then grinned mischievously. "Ohhh."

"We'll get a laugh and your boyfriend will come out of this duel unscathed."

"He's not my...! Never mind."

"Now you go intimidate Jelly Legs over there while I make that coward an even greater coward."

Rainbow nodded and flew back to the frightened pagecolt.

"Tell me, sir," Applejack begged, "what kind of stallion is he? I saw him beat you at the tournament the other day."

"Yeah, don't remind me," Rainbow said, rubbing the sore in his chest. "Trust me. I've faced this guy hundreds of times. That was on one of his good days."

Applejack gulped. "What are his bad days like?"

The pegasus leaned in to whisper. "Pray you don't find out."

"Why does he want to hurt me?"

"Heck if I know. Last week, he challenged me to a duel just for getting more slop than him for lunch. Of course, being a knight myself, I managed to get out okay, though I haven't been able to bend my back hoof in the same way ever since."

"Can't we just settle this peacefully?"

"You can try, but he's a real bad listener. Seriously, he didn't believe

me when I said the sky was blue!"

Meanwhile, on the other side of the orchard, Discord was leading Soarin to his rival.

"An expert swordspony, you say?" Soarin asked with nervousness.

"Oh, he accepted the challenge tremendously!" Discord declared. "He drew his sword at once and I nearly lost my ear!"

The knight shrieked. "If I had known he was that crazy, I wouldn't have challenged him! Is it too late to call it a draw?"

"Well, I'll see what I can do."

The draconequus smirked and left his friend to meet up with Rainbow, who was just returning from Applejack.

"This guy's a wimp!" Rainbow declared. "He's shivering in his coat!"

"His fur coat or his jacket?" Discord asked.

"Both!"

"Sir Soarin's just as much a mess. He thinks the colt is a demon!"

"What do we do now? They won't come within two feet of each other!"

"Watch and learn, my amateur prankster. Watch and learn."

Discord slithered over to the pagecolt.

"Well, I did the best I could, lad. He won't see reason. I suggest you defend yourself. Be a stallion."

He snapped his fingers and a sword appeared in Applejack's hoof. A rather heavy one, at that. Applejack struggled to lift it off the ground, fearing what was to come. She had never fought any pony before, despite her training, and she had never held a real sword before. What was worse, if she was hurt in this duel, a doctor would have to be called, and they would see just how unlike a stallion she really

was.

"I tried, friend," Discord told Soarin. "Now that you've challenged him, he insists he'll go through with it. He says you're a coward if you back out."

The knight gulped. "At least I'll be a *live* coward!"

He attempted to make a break for it, but Discord caught him by the tail.

"Is that any way to fight for your lady fair?" the draconequus asked "Is that any way to prove yourself for the mare you love? Are you a stallion, or are you a chicken?"

Soarin narrowed his eyes. "You're right! I'll do it for Rarity!" He gulped again. "I just hope he doesn't hurt me too much."

Discord had to push the knight so that he and the pagecolt were standing two feet away from each other. Both stood petrified as they exchanged stares. Discord appeared between them, donning a referee's uniform.

"Alright, boys," he sad, putting his paw and claw up, "I want a nice, clean fight. And by clean, I mean no more than a gallon of blood spilt."

It was too late for that, as the blood seemed to drain from both fighters' faces.

"First stallion down loses. On your mark, get set..." Discord blew into his whistle. "FIGHT!"

Both adversaries turned to run. Discord grabbed Soarin while Rainbow handled Applejack. The two were facing each other again and after a long moment of petrification, they slowly lifted their swords and closed their eyes, neither of them daring to step forth.

Rainbow snickered. "You were right. This *is* fun."

"Told you," Discord whispered. "Ain't I a stinker?"

Applejack opened her eyes a crack and then realized how ridiculous she was being. *Come on, where's your courage, Applejacqueline? You're a skilled fencer! You just have a heavier weapon this time.*

Soarin opened his eyes and thought, *Come on, Soarin. Don't be chicken! Do it for the Lady Rarity!*

The two of them lifted their swords and charged for each other. They were suddenly blocked by a cloaked figure that materialized between them.

"Stop!" a mare's voice cried.

She was facing Soarin, but the knight could not see her face. He did, however, see a pink glow and he and his adversary were suddenly frozen in their tracks. The new player then magically lifted Applejack's sword from her grasp.

"You want him?" the cloaked figure asked, waving the sword. "You'll have to go through me!"

Rainbow and Discord stood in shock.

"You?!" the latter exclaimed. "Who *are* you?"

"I'm this stallion's friend!" the stranger declared.

"Huh?" Applejack uttered, who could still talk in her frozen state.

"I missed you at *The Sugar Cube* . If I had known you would get yourself into trouble, I never would have left you."

Discord laughed. "And what makes you think you are any match for us?"

Although he could not see the pony, he could have sworn she was smirking.

"Perhaps you've heard of me. I am..."

The draconequus and the knights gasped as the mare lifted her hood, revealing her to be a blue unicorn with a platinum mane.

"The Great and Powerful Trixie!" She waved her sword. "Still think you can take me on?"

Rainbow snorted. "You're nothing but a faker! The only thing that made you 'great and powerful' was that Alicorn Amulet, and that was taken away from you! Aren't you supposed to be banished or something?"

"Maybe," Trixie grunted, poking the sword in Rainbow's gut. "What are you going to do about it?"

" *We'll* do something about it!"

Trixie gasped as a magic bubble encased her and two unicorn guards appeared behind her.

"Shoot, the fuzz," Discord mumbled. He whispered to Soarin, who was no longer petrified. "Put away your sword, fool!"

"Hey!" Trixie shouted, banging on the force field. "What's the big idea?"

The guards lowered her to the ground and allowed the bubble to dissolve before slapping a metal box on the unicorn's horn and cuffs on her hooves.

"Trixie Lulamoon," one of the guards said, "a.k.a. the Great and Powerful Trixie; by order of the Duke of Illyrimane, you are hereby under arrest for breaking your exile and to be imprisoned immediately."

"This is unfair!" Trixie declared. "Trixie didn't do anything wrong! Trixie was just helping a friend!" She turned to Applejack. "You've got to help me! That money I gave you should be enough to bail me out!"

Applejack turned around to see if there was any pony behind her and then faced the unicorn again.

"Me?"

"Yes, you!" Trixie exclaimed. "Please, help! Use the money I gave

you!"

The disguised mare blinked. "Money? What money?"

Trixie's eyes widened in disbelief. "Don't tell me you spent it all!"

"Look, I don't know what you're talking about, but officers, this mare just saved my life. If you would release her..."

"We have our orders," the second guard declared.

Applejack dug into her jacket and pulled out her pouch of gold. "Is this enough?"

"Sorry, but there is no bail for this one," said the first guard. "She may only be released by the order of the Duke."

"This is all because I came after *you* !" Trixie cried. "Please, friend! You know I did no wrong! Everything I did since you washed ashore was for *you* !"

Applejack blinked. "I appreciate what you did for me just now and I'll think of a way to pay you back, but...what are you talking about?"

Trixie felt as if she had been stabbed in the chest. "You deny me? After I saved your life?! After I pulled you from the sea?! After I risked my life to follow you?!"

"What are you talking about?! I've never seen you before in my life!"

The unicorn grunted furiously. "You traitor! I should've let you drown! That's what you wanted, isn't it? To be with your sisters? And to think I cared for you. To think I actually *loved* you!"

Applejack jumped back, even more confused than she was before.

"The mare's mad!" the first guard exclaimed. "Take her away!"

"You will rue this day, Big Mac!" Trixie shouted as the guards hauled her off. "You will rue the day you betrayed the Great and Powerful Trixie!"

Applejack gasped at the name of her brother. Suddenly, everything came together.

"Wait!" she called, chasing after the guards. "Big Mac? You saved him? Is he alive? Tell me! Where is he?!"

But the guards would not stop for her, and Trixie had closed her ears from whom she thought was the colt that had betrayed her.

Applejack stood there, overwhelmed with what she had just discovered. Trixie had thought she was Big Macintosh. How could that be? She did not look anything like her brother, aside from the eyes and freckles. Still, the unicorn had mentioned his name. He was alive then? Her heart swelled with hope at the thought.

Applejack was determined to find out more, but she could not do it while the unicorn was in jail. Even if she was allowed visitation, she would most likely not listen to her. Only the command of the Duke would release her, and that was something Applejack had to her advantage.

The trio of tricksters watched as the pagecolt disappeared from their sight.

"Well, he's a coward, if ever I saw one," Discord said, crossing his arms.

"He let the mare who loved him go to prison and denied even knowing her!" Rainbow huffed. "Talk about disloyalty!"

"Ah, he's not so tough!" Soarin smirked. "Come on, let's go teach that wimp a lesson!"

"No argument here."

"Ooh!" Discord said, rubbing his paw and claw together. "More fun! Let's go!"

Big Mac struggled as the pink jester dragged his tail in her mouth. She was impossibly strong for a mare.

"Let go!" he screamed.

"Okay!" Pinkie said, spitting out his tail. "We're here, anyway."

Big Macintosh stood up, looked around and saw that they were in a private orchard of some sort.

"Why'd you bring me here, you loon?" he demanded.

"My!" Pinkie exclaimed. "Some pony's a bit of a name-caller today! Eh, Applejack?"

"For the last time! My name is not Applejack!"

"Oh, sure! No, your name is not Applejack! No, my lady did not send me to get you! I suppose this isn't my nose either?"

"You're confusing me with some pony else!"

"Am I?" She tapped his head. "Do you not have blond hair?"

"I do, but..."

"Do you not have an orange coat?"

"I can explain..."

"Do you not have green eyes, freckles and a marish face?"

"Marish... Hey! Are you making fun of my looks?! This isn't even my natural color!"

"I knew it!" Pinkie squealed. "I *knew* you dyed it! Rainbow owes me two bits!"

Big Mac sighed and fished into his pouch. "Here." He tossed a few coins at the fool. "Here's some money so you'll leave me alone. Go do your fooling somewhere else!"

"There he is!" yelled a voice.

The stallion groaned. "What now?"

He turned to see two pegasus knights and a strange creature coming towards him. The knight in the front with dark blue hair looked especially angry.

"You!" he shouted. "Pipsqueak! Take this!"

Big Mac cried out as the knight slapped him across the face.

"Are all the ponies in this town crazy?!"

"Come on!" Soarin challenged, lifting his hooves. "Put 'em up, you big chicken! We'll do this stallion to stallion!"

Big Macintosh narrowed his eyes. "Fine! Take that!"

Soarin yelped as he received a blow to the stomach.

"And that!" A punch in the chin. "And that!" A sock in the eye.

Soarin wheezed in pain and looked at the stallion in fear. He had not expected him to fight back. And had he suddenly grown taller?

"Hey!" Rainbow cried, moving protectively in front of Soarin. "You wanna dance, buddy? Come on, let's dance!"

"I'm telling Rarity on you guys!" Pinkie shouted as she ran into the mansion.

"Two against one?" Big Mac said, rolling up his sleeves. "That's hardly fair. For *you* !"

He tackled the two knights and wrestled them to the ground. Discord summoned a bag of popcorn.

"Finally, some action!"

He screeched as one of Big Mac's hooves shot up and kicked him in the knee. Discord hissed angrily.

"Oh, that's it!"

He jumped into the pile and tried to get a piece of the stallion. Rarity came out of the house and gasped when she saw the display.

"What do you think you're doing?!" she screamed, racing towards the fight. "Get off of him, you brutes!"

She used her magic to lift Discord and the knights off Big Macintosh and tossed them into a tree.

"Pranking ponies is one thing," Rarity said sternly, "but *this* ! This is just uncivil!"

"But my lady..." Discord started to protest.

"Get out of here! All of you! Now!"

Discord did not argue and teleported all three of them out of there. Rarity turned to the orange colt and knelt down to help him up.

"Are you alright, my dearest?" she pleaded. "I must apologize for my uncle and his friends. They are such ruffians! Are you hurt, my love?"

"I'm..."

Big Mac stopped as he locked eyes with his savior. As soon as he caught sight of those sparkling blue sapphires, he could hear a chorus of angels singing "Hallelujah!" Rose petals fell from the sky and surrounded the unicorn's glowing white face. She smiled gently at him and Big Mac felt his heart stop.

She was the most beautiful mare he had ever seen.

"Are you hurt?" she asked again, her voice as sweet as honey.

Big Mac was in such a daze, all he could say was: "Nope."

"Oh, good. Again, I apologize. You're not the first victim of this brutality. Come into the house and I'll explain my uncle's mischief."

He barely understood a word she said. Big Mac thought he was dreaming, for it was impossible that such a mare could exist. Not only was she a jewel beyond compare, but she had saved him from being beaten to a pulp. Strength was something he had always wanted in a mare.

If he was dreaming, he never wanted to wake.

"Come, let's go," Rarity insisted, leading him towards the house. "Please? I know you don't like me much, but would you?"

She batted her eyelashes and Big Mac did not think twice before saying, "Eeyup."

Rarity's heart leapt with joy as she and the stallion raced into the mansion.

Either ponies are really bad with faces or Big Macintosh just looks marish. I do not ship Rarity and Big Mac. Personally, I don't care who Rarity's shipped with (as long as it's not Spike). I'm just following the story.

Imprisonment

Woo hoo! I'm on a roll here!

Trixie yelped as she was tossed in a cell. The guards put up a magic shield on the bars so that she could not escape. The walls, floor and ceiling were already magic-proof for special prisoners. Trixie roared and pounded angrily on the force field.

"The Great and Powerful Trixie can't be locked up forever!" she shouted to the guards as they left. "Trixie is unstoppable! Trixie is unbeatable! Trixie is..."

"Why are you referring to yourself in the third-person?"

The unicorn turned her head to see the occupant of the cell across from her. A large, blue minotaur was lying on his cot, lazily scraping a piece of chalk against the prison wall.

"It's for dramatic effect," Trixie said with a huff. "So what are you in for, Sir Minotaur? Did you kill some pony?"

He rolled his eyes. "No."

"Rob a house?"

"No."

"Beat some pony up, at least?"

"No."

"Then what?"

He sighed. "I got melon juice all over a donkey's suit."

Trixie stared at the minotaur for a long while and then burst into laughter.

"Seriously?"

He shrugged. "He was a very cranky donkey."

"That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard!"

The minotaur sat up. "Isn't it? Iron Will did nothing wrong and look where he is!"

Trixie smirked. "Now look who's referring to themselves in the third-person. Hypocrite."

He locked eyes with her and they both giggled.

"So what's a fine young mare like you doing in here?" Iron Will inquired.

The unicorn groaned. "You might want to sit down."

"Ahem."

He gestured to himself on the cot.

"Right." Trixie cleared her throat. "High treason, being accomplice to murder in the first, second and seventeenth degree; illegal use of dark magic, attempted murder, selling rocks without a license, robbery, changing my name without proper paperwork, disturbing the peace, lying about my age, being a show-off, being accomplice to hostile takeover, under-age drinking, using magic under influence, breaking exile, participating in a sword fight, resisting arrest and speeding."

The minotaur blinked. "Impressive."

Trixie shrugged. "See why I can't make bail?"

Iron Will smiled and then remembered something. "Hold on. You're *that* Trixie? Daughter of Sombra the Traitor?"

The unicorn frowned. "Hey, you can't pick family."

"Oh, I meant no offense, but aren't you supposed to be in exile?"

"I was, thanks to that Twilight Sparkle!"

She let out another groan and slumped to the floor.

"Then what are you doing here?" Iron Will asked.

"I followed some pony," Trixie replied, gritting her teeth. "And he betrayed me!"

She pounded her hoof on the force field.

"So how long is your sentence?" the minotaur inquired.

"I'll be lucky if I get life," Trixie sighed. "At least I deserve it. How long have you been in here?"

Iron Will glanced at the marks on the wall. "Three weeks."

"For getting some pony messy? Gee, that's harsh."

"He said Iron Will assaulted him."

"You want injustice? I save the guy's life *twice* and the minute I'm arrested, he acts like he doesn't know me! Daddy warned me about stallions like that! The only thing he was ever right about!"

"Hey, cheer up. I have a friend who serves the Duke. I've tried to get a message to her, err, him, but the guards won't let me."

"Well, I'll most likely be called to see the Duke to receive my punishment."

"If you do, tell his pagecolt that Iron Will is in here. His name is Applejack."

Trixie scrunched her nose as he said this. *Applejack... Why does that name sound familiar?*

Pinkie Pie, Discord and Fluttershy tiptoed as they descended into the dungeon.

"Why are we doing this again?" Fluttershy asked.

"Hush!" Discord hissed. "Cranky's locked up in the darkest cell in this dungeon. Rarity thinks he's mad. We must make Cranky himself believe he's mad."

"Haven't we done enough?"

"This will be fun, believe me."

"But why am I here again?" Pinkie inquired.

"You're here to cast the demons out of Cranky."

"WHAT?!" she screamed.

"Shhh!"

"What?" she whispered. "You want me to perform an exorcism?"

"No," Discord replied, summoning a dark robe, a bald cap and a beard. "You will disguise yourself as a priest and *pretend* to perform an exorcism."

"Ooh! Roleplay!" She grabbed the pile of clothes and threw them on, making herself look like an old stallion. "I'll be Father Puddinghead!"

Discord slapped himself in the forehead. "Really?"

"Hey! You make the disguise, I make the name!"

"Fine, whatever! Just get down there and treat Cranky like he's crazy!"

"Can do!"

Discord then spoke in a louder voice. "This way, Father Puddinghead!"

"Show me to the loony!" Pinkie said in the exaggerated voice of an old stallion.

Not bad , thought Discord.

"Who's there?" called Cranky's frightened voice.

"It's Father Puddinghead!" Pinkie declared. "I've come to see Doodle the Doo-Doo Head!"

"No pony calls me Doodle!"

"My, he's rather rude, isn't he?"

"He's doing what the demons are telling him to do!" Discord exclaimed, suppressing a snicker.

"Which cell is his?"

Discord opened a slit in the wall and Pinkie peered inside to see the shape of a donkey huddled in a corner.

"Mister Doodle?" Pinkie called.

"Father Puddinghead?" Cranky exclaimed, coming to the tiny window. "Oh, good Father! Please, go to my lady..."

"Ah!" Pinkie screamed. "He *is* mad! Talking about nothing but ladies!"

"Please, let me out of here!"

"And who are you to command a priest, blasphemist?!"

Discord had to return to the bottom of the stairs where Fluttershy was so that he could giggle without being heard.

"Is she not a mad genius?" Discord whispered.

"I was framed!" Cranky declared. "Well, not exactly. See, I was told to do all those things by..."

"I knew it!" Pinkie screamed. "He's possessed!"

The jester turned priest pulled out a bowl of water from her cloak, dipped a sprinkler in it and flung water at the donkey.

"By the power of Celestia," Pinkie chanted, "I cast thee out, demon!

Out, damn demon! Out, I say! Oops, wrong play."

"I'm not possessed!" Cranky insisted.

"Exactly what a possessed donkey would say!" She continued flicking water at him. "Demon donkey! Demon donkey!"

Discord covered his mouth, trying so hard not to laugh.

"Please, listen to me!" Cranky shouted.

Pinkie sighed. "Well, he's a lost cause. Nothing more I can do here. His soul is doomed."

"Father Puddinghead! Father Puddinghead!"

The donkey's voice was drowned out as Pinkie slid the window closed. She grinned as she walked over to Discord and Fluttershy.

"Good job, my friend!" the draconequus exclaimed. "You could have done that without the disguise! He can't even see you!"

"Good!" Pinkie wheezed, removing the remnants of her disguise. "It was getting hot in there!"

"Discord, this is going too far," Fluttershy said firmly. "We're going to have to let him out at some point."

"Come on, my dear," Discord said, putting his arm around the pegasus. "This was your idea, remember?"

"I didn't think you were going to lock him up."

"We can't let our secret get out. This is the only way to keep him quiet. Of course, I can always turn him into an orange, and..."

Fluttershy angrily wriggled out of his grasp. "Is this what you are going to do with your life? Chaos, chaos and more chaos?! There are more important things, you know?!"

"Oh, yeah? Like what?"

She looked up at him with tear-filled eyes that made Discord's heart

shatter. Of all the times she had criticized him, called him out on his behavior, he had never seen her cry.

She turned away from him and raced up the stone steps.

"Fluttershy, please!" Discord called.

"She's got a point, you know?"

The draconequus turned to the jester. "What?"

Pinkie shrugged. "There are more important things than chaos."

"What? What could possibly be more important?"

Her eyes looked to where Fluttershy had gone. Discord followed her gaze and then looked back at her.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Pinkie demanded. "Go after her!"

Discord smiled in thanks and flew up the stairs. Pinkie turned in the direction of Cranky's cell. She agreed, they had pushed the prank a little too far, but there could be a way to put things right and still have a little fun.

She smiled in mischief as she started skipping down the row of cells.

" *When I was a little filly and the sun was going down...* " she sang.

Cranky recognized the voice and cried, "Pinkie?"

" *The darkness and the shadows, they would always make me frown...* "

"Pinkie, is that you?"

" *I'd hide under my pillow, from what I thought I saw...* "

"Pinkie!"

The fool stopped in her tracks and turned around, pretending she had heard the voice for the first time. "Who's there?"

"Cranky!"

"Cranky who?"

"Pinkie, I'm in this cell! Please, you've got to help me!"

Pinkie snorted. "You're bad at this game, Cranky."

She opened the slit in the wall anyway.

"Oh, Pinkie!" the donkey exclaimed, putting his hoof through the window. "I've never been so happy to see you!"

"Really?" Pinkie grinned. "Well, that's a first. What are you doing in here, Doodle? This is a lousy place for a sleepover."

"They think I'm mad, Pinkie! They locked me in this dark, damp cell and sent a blasted minster to..."

"You might want to watch your tone, mister! The minister's still here!"

"What?"

Pinkie giggled as she used her old stallion voice. "You best keep away from this one, Madam Pinkie. This one's possessed." She then spoke in her regular voice and moved to the other side of the cell. "Possessed! Well, I knew he was cranky, but I didn't think he was crazy! That's usually my job!"

"Yes, but you are paid to be crazy!" she said as Father Puddinghead.

Pinkie shrugged. "True that."

"Please, Father Puddinghead!" Cranky pleaded. "I'm not crazy!"

"Don't believe a word he says!" said Father Puddinghead. "They are the Devil's words!"

"I won't, Father," Pinkie said with a nod.

"Celestia be with you."

"And with you, sir. Bye!"

"Pinkie, don't leave me!" Cranky cried.

"Sorry, Doodle, I'm not supposed to talk to you."

"Don't talk to me then! But get me some paper, a quill, ink and a candle so that I may write to my lady! I am as well in my wits as any creature in Illyrimane!"

Pinkie eyed him suspiciously. "Really?"

"Yes!"

"Prove it!"

"In any way I can!"

"Okay. What's two plus two?"

"Four!"

"What color is the sky?"

"Blue!"

"When's my birthday?"

"Uh...I don't know!"

Pinkie snorted. "Of course you wouldn't know my birthday! Only my friends know my birthday!"

"So you see I'm not crazy?"

"Hmm. Yeah. But you're still cranky."

"Fine! Just get me the paper, please!"

"Okey, doki, loki!"

Pinkie skipped out of the dungeon to fulfill Cranky's request. She did not like Cranky, but she hated it when others were not smiling. If

Rarity knew what was going on, it would put an end to all this insanity.

For a small mare, Fluttershy was awfully quick. Discord pursued her for what seemed like hours until he finally made the decision to teleport and block her path.

"Fluttershy, can't we talk about this?"

The pegasus mare gritted her teeth. "We have nothing to talk about."

She tried to move past him, but he grabbed her hoof. "Yes, we do! You have to explain to me why you're so angry! Is it because of this prank? Because you're as guilty for it as I am!"

"I know!" Fluttershy cried, tears forming in her eyes once again. "I'm just as guilty! Do you know what that means, Discord? If Rarity finds out about this, she'll not only throw you out, but me too! You at least have your chaos to take care of you. You can even build your own home! What about me? I have no family, no money, nowhere to go!"

She collapsed in exhaustion. Discord caught her and cradled her in his arms. He watched the tears stain her beautiful face and found he did not like them there. He wiped them away with the thumb of his paw and stroked her mane with his claw.

His heart swelled as he reached an epiphany. He cared. He cared for Fluttershy. He had admired her for quite a while, but it was only now that he realized he cared. The thought of her wandering the streets aimlessly, begging for food, or even worse...

He shook the thought out of his head. He would not let any pony touch his Fluttershy. Of all the ponies in the world, she was the only one who truly cared for him. He knew she did. She had criticized him all these years so he would not be turned to stone. Even if he was just thrown out, she did not want him gone either.

And to think he was close to destroying this mare's happiness all for some silly revenge game.

"Where would I go?" she whispered. "Where would I go?"

Discord took her face in his paw and claw and looked deeply into her sparkling teal eyes.

"If Rarity does find out," he said slowly, "and she does turn us out of doors, I will go wherever you go."

Fluttershy's eyes widened. "What?"

"I won't leave you to fend for yourself on the streets. You are much too precious to me."

She looked as if she did not believe him.

"I mean it," he insisted. "In truth, the real reason I wanted to get back at Cranky was not because he humiliated me, but because he spoke harshly to you. I...I didn't like it."

Fluttershy's mouth was open, but her mind was in such a muddle that she did not know what to say. Discord found himself tongue-tied too, unsure of how to continue. He then did the only thing that seemed appropriate at the moment. He pressed his lips against hers.

The minute they met, the two of them could hear a chorus of angels singing "Hallelujah!" It was as if Heaven was making its decree. Fluttershy was still confused, but she was so lost in the sensation of the kiss that she did not care.

Discord could not get enough of her lips. They were so sweet, so delicious. He just wanted to keep kissing her forever. With his magic, it was possible.

But there was so much he still wanted to say that he had to pull away. As he did, Fluttershy looked at him in shock.

"Do...do you...?" she attempted to say.

"I do," Discord said, taking her hoof. "I love you, Fluttershy."

He surprised her even more by dropping to one knee. "Marry me."

"What?" Fluttershy gasped, putting her hoof to her mouth.

"Yes, marry me. Right now. We'll go find a priest, wake up Rainbow and Soarin so they can be witnesses, and we'll be joined in the bonds of holy matrimony."

"But...but...so soon?"

"Chances are Rarity will learn of our prank tomorrow. I don't want to waste a minute."

Fluttershy shook her head. "B-but...it's so sudden! I don't know."

"Please, Fluttershy!" Discord pleaded, pulling her closer. "I've given it a lot of thought and it's apparent that you're the one for me!"

She blushed and shyly looked down at the floor. "But...I just don't understand...what you even see in me..."

"Don't talk like that! You're beautiful, you're kind-hearted, and any pony who can pull a fast one on Cranky is an angel in my eyes! So please, would you?" He then frowned. "Unless, of course...you don't want me."

Fluttershy stared at him for a long while. He was not much to look at, but she knew that despite his mischief, Discord had a good heart. She could especially see it in his eyes now as he was asking for her hoof. He had once told her that he would never let something as petty as love tie him down. He must truly care for her that he would change his mind.

She then smiled warmly at him. "I *do* love you, Discord, and...I *will* marry you."

Discord cried with joy and lifted her into his arms in a bridal fashion.

"Then come, my love!" he exclaimed. "For in an hour or so, we will be together forever!"

Fluttershy giggled and lifted her head so their lips would meet again. At long last, she would be with the creature of her dreams. Who knew it would take such an elaborate prank to bring them together?

Well, that's one couple down. Would you believe we're almost done?

A Change in the Circumstances

I realize this chapter is short, but the next one has a lot of action in it and it was getting too long combining it with this chapter.

Big Mac woke from the amazing dream. He had been with an angel, glowing brighter than the brightest diamond in the world. When his vision came into focus he found himself in an unfamiliar room. He was lying on a daybed and then realized it had not been a dream. His first instinct was to check if he was clothed. Thankfully, he was.

The beautiful unicorn had been real. Rarity, he believed her name to be. They had talked for some time, she of the latest fashions and he of Haystings, without revealing his parentage. He never told mares who he was, for fear they would only want him for his money and title. This unicorn did not seem to care and did not even ask of his station. She treated him as if she had known him all her life.

Soon they found themselves kissing. As the wonderful sensation passed through him, the tongue became involved and then the pretty mare pressed him against the daybed. They must have fallen asleep in each other's hooves.

The night had been wonderful, but what Big Macintosh did not understand was why it had happened. He stood up and looked out the window. The sky was still blue, Celestia's sun was where it should be, the grass was still green. He looked down at himself. He had all his hooves, his coat felt real, it was still orange from Trixie's spell...

Trixie! He had not thought of his dear friend! She was probably worried sick! He would have a hard time explaining what happened, especially since he was not sure himself.

Or was he imagining all this? No, everything around him felt real. He could not be mad. He considered that the mare could be mad, but

he did not think that possible either. If she were mad, she would not be able to command her servants and run the household.

Something was not right about all this.

"Darling?"

He turned to the sound of the sweet voice and his mind went blank at the sight of the unicorn. She was wearing a simple, but elegant white gown and a wedding veil. She was followed by a priest.

"Oh, you must think I'm going too fast," Rarity said, taking the hooves of her beloved, "but after what we shared last night, I could not wait any longer!" She smiled as she gazed at his face. "It's funny. For some reason, you look even handsomer than when we first met. I promise you I'll be a devoted wife. We can keep it in secret until you're ready for us to come out in public. Then we can have an appropriate celebration. Oh. If...if you'll have me."

Big Macintosh was so enthralled with her beautiful face that he was not thinking straight. He was still unsure as to what was going on, but the only thing that felt right about this situation was her.

"Eeyup," he said dreamily.

Rarity grinned and threw her hooves around him. "Oh, how I've dreamed to hear you say that! Let's go, my love, so that Celestia may bless our union!"

"Eeyup."

"You have to tell him!" Twilight urged.

"Why now?" Applejack asked.

"Rarity gave you a locket! You have to fix this before he gets the wrong idea!"

"I...I don't know, Twi..."

"He'll understand if you explain the reason why! Now go!"

Applejack gulped and opened the door to the throne room. Spike was in his usual spot, listening to Octavia play the cello. Both Applejack and Twilight were surprised, because something about this scene was different. The music was not sad, but cheerful, and Spike was...smiling.

"Uh...Spike?" Twilight uttered.

The dragon sat up and his smile grew wider. "Good morning, sister! Good morning, Applejack! Lovely day, isn't it?"

The two mares glanced at each other.

"Ya want me to tell him while he's so happy?" Applejack whispered.

"Of course!" Twilight replied. "You're never going to find him in better shape to receive the news!" She turned to her brother. "Applejack has something to tell you."

"Don't tell me!" Spike exclaimed, leaping off the throne. "You two are engaged!"

"What?!" the two of them shouted.

"Come on, I know love when I see it! For the past few weeks, you've both been walking about with your heads in the clouds, staring into space with dreamy looks in your eyes and barely paying attention to what I am saying. Seeing you two holding hooves at the jousting match only confirmed my suspicions!"

"You saw that?" Twilight asked nervously.

"Of course, I did! I just want you two to know that you have my blessing!"

"No!" Applejack insisted. "You've got it all wrong! We didn't come here to talk about that!"

"Oh?" Spike said, raising an eyebrow. "Then what did you come to talk about?"

Applejack looked over at Twilight, who only nudged him forth.

"Ya see, my lord," the disguised mare tried to say, "there's something you should know about me. I..."

The minute she looked into his eyes, she lost all knowledge of speech. How would he react if she told him? Would he be angry or just shocked? And what would he even say? Why did he look so happy right now? Was it because he thought the Lady Rarity was warming up to him? Had Applejack somehow given him false hope?

There were so many questions running through her head that Applejack did not even think about the next thing she said:

"Lady Rarity is in love with me!"

Her hoof flew to her mouth as soon as the words escaped. Her heart sank as Spike's smile disappeared.

"WHAT?!" he shouted furiously.

"But she," Twilight said, "I mean he, didn't mean to make it happen!"

"Honest!" Applejack insisted. "I did nothing to encourage her!"

Spike paced back and forth. "You're lying to me! She can't be in love with you!"

"She is! Or at least thinks she is. She gave me this locket and told me to wear it!"

She brought out the necklace for proof. Spike took it in his claw, opened it, saw Rarity's picture and the engraving: *R loves AJ.* His cheeks grew hot with jealousy and he threw the locket to the floor.

"How could you?!" he bellowed. "I trusted you!"

"I didn't do anything!" Applejack declared. "I don't love her! I just...I didn't..."

"What Applejack means," Twilight interjected, "is that this wouldn't have happened if you had just gone and told Rarity your feelings

yourself!"

The mares jumped back as Spike started blowing smoke out of his nostrils. "You're right! I'm going to see her right now! Twilight, you're coming with us!"

"Us?" Applejack asked.

"Of course! We're both going to set her straight! And bring your sister too! Fillies are more influential!"

Twilight glared at the pagecolt. "That's not all Applejack has to tell you."

He turned around angrily. "You mean there's *more* ?!"

Applejack's face went pale. She could not tell him. Not now while he was so angry. So she picked another issue that was just as important.

"There's a mare in prison, my lord. She's a criminal, but she saved my life yesterday in a sword fight. I tried to bail her out, but they said only your command could set her free."

This request seemed to calm Spike down a little. "Well, if this mare saved you, I would certainly free her. What is her name?"

"They called her...Trixie something."

Both Spike and Twilight gasped. "Trixie?!"

"You know her?"

" *Know* her?!" Spike exclaimed. "She tried to kill our father!"

"Her *father* tried to kill our father," Twilight corrected him. "Trixie's target was me. She's returned to Illyrimane?"

"Yes, but she saved my life," Applejack reminded them.

"I'm sorry, Applejack, but we cannot release her under any circumstances. Trixie is a dangerous unicorn and a traitor."

"If she's so dangerous, why did she risk saving my life?"

"If she's in prison, we'll have to deal with her any way," Spike grumbled. "You!" he shouted to one of the guards. "Go to the prison and tell the soldiers to bring Trixie Lulamoon to the Lady Rarity's estate! We'll deal with her on our way there and save ourselves a trip to the prison."

He then called for two more guards, one of them Flash Sentry, to accompany them and Applejack returned to the throne room shortly with her sister. As they set off on their journey, Twilight brought Applejack aside.

"First you tell Spike that the love of his life wants another and now you want us to free a dangerous criminal?!"

"Trixie mentioned my brother's name," Applejack whispered. "I must find out if he's alive."

Twilight looked at her wearily. "I hope you know what you're doing."

"So do I," the disguised mare mumbled to herself.

Discord had Fluttershy pressed against the wall, his mouth happily ravishing hers.

"Discord," Fluttershy giggled, playfully pushing him away. "I have my duties."

"Indeed you do," Discord said, wriggling his eyebrows. "Duties to your husband."

He held up his paw, revealing the gold band on his finger.

"What if some pony sees us?" his wife asked nervously.

"Who cares? We have nothing to hide."

Fluttershy smiled and closed her eyes as he moved in to kiss her again. Then, out of the corner of his eyes, he spied a familiar orange

stallion prancing across the orchard. He seemed to be in merry spirits, the perfect time to catch him off-guard.

His wife opened her eyes in confusion. "Is something wrong?"

"I'll be right back, darling," Discord said, releasing his hold on her. "I have a score to settle."

Only two more chapters to go!

Conflicts and Resolutions

And now the storm rolls in...

"Come on, Pinkie!" Rainbow cried, trying to swipe a piece of parchment out of Pinkie's hoof. "Let me see what he wrote!"

"Sure!" Pinkie replied. "On one condition."

"What?"

"That you don't ask to see this letter."

"Pinkie!"

"Excuse me?"

The two of them turned to see the Duke Spike and his entourage, which included the Lady Twilight, Applejack, Applebloom, holding her sister's hoof; and two guards.

"You both serve the Lady Rarity, right?" the dragon asked.

" *She* does," Rainbow said, pointing to Pinkie. "I'm just visiting."

"Hey, I remember you! You sang for us the other day! How's it going?"

"Eh," Pinkie said with a shrug. "I've been better. Times are tough, you know? I'm a little," she held out her hat, "low on cash."

Spike sighed. "I see."

He pulled out a coin and dropped in the jingling hat.

"Thank you very much!" Pinkie piped. "But...that's hardly enough to cover a full meal. You know what they say. Two bits are better than one."

The dragon rolled his eyes and gave her another coin.

"You know? They also say that three's the charm!"

"Nice try," Spike smirked. "You're not getting more out of this dragon."

Pinkie shrugged. "Fair enough." She put her hat back on. "We'll go get Rarity for you. Come on, Dashie!"

As soon as the two rascals left, a group of officers entered the orchard, hauling a chained Trixie.

"Trixie demands to see a lawyer!" she shouted. "Trixie has her rights! All ponies are created equal!"

She gasped as she was brought before the Duke and his party. She narrowed her eyes at the purple unicorn.

"Twilight Sparkle," she grumbled.

"Trixie," Twilight said, gritting her teeth.

"Don't think I haven't forgotten our last encounter, when you tricked me into removing that Alicorn Amulet!" She turned to the Duke. "And you! You were just a little squirt at the time, but your father had me banished!"

"And you rightly deserved it!" Twilight bellowed. "You and your father tried to overthrow him!"

"We would've succeeded too, if those princesses hadn't intervened. Without them, it would've been easy to take out the old fool. I mean, come on! He was idiotic enough to put a baby dragon in charge rather than his own daughter!"

Twilight charged forth, only to be restrained by Flash. She hissed and lashed her hooves out furiously at the blue unicorn. Spike raised an eyebrow at Applejack.

"Are you sure you want her released?"

"She did rescue me," Applejack reminded him.

"I don't want any pity from *you* !" Trixie spat. "You're the worst of them all! I did more than *rescue* you! I pulled you out of the Jaws of Death! I nursed you back to health and kept you company over the last three weeks! I followed you into town, despite my sentence, and after we parted for an hour, I stopped those scoundrels from killing you! And then you deny me, treat me like I'm nothing!"

"Hold up!" Twilight commanded. "You say you tended him for three weeks?"

"Yes!"

"And when did he come to town?" Spike asked.

"Yesterday!"

"That's impossible!" Applejack declared.

"Yeah!" Applebloom spoke. "Applejack and I have been serving the Duke for the past three weeks!"

"Indeed," Spike confirmed, crossing his arms. "Your story makes no sense."

Trixie's eyes widened as she finally noticed the little filly and heard how she had addressed the colt she was holding hooves with.

"Applejack?" she uttered in confusion.

"There she is!" Spike cried.

The Lady Rarity, dressed in a white gown, was coming up the walkway with Rainbow and Pinkie.

"Take her aside," Spike told the soldiers. "We'll settle this matter later."

"Did you say his name was Applejack?" Trixie demanded.

"And keep her quiet, would you?" He smiled as Rarity approached

him. "Rarity, you look radiant to..."

"Applejack!" Rarity exclaimed, moving past the dragon and addressing the pagecolt. "Where've you been? You were supposed to meet me fifteen minutes ago!"

"Huh?" Applejack uttered, her eyes blinking in confusion.

Spike was just as confused, but he put on a smile and turned to her.

"Rarity, I've come to..."

"Well, Applejack?" Rarity said, staring accusingly at the pagecolt. "What do you have to say for yourself?"

"Uh..." Applejack stammered. "Madam, my lord wishes to..."

She gasped as the unicorn placed her hooves on her shoulders. "My only lord is you."

Spike's face burned with fury and passion. He let out a growl and moved between the two, pushing them apart.

"Are you so cruel," Spike said sternly, "that you still ignore my affections?!"

"My lord," Rarity said, turning her nose up, "my feelings are constant."

"I know the truth, madam! I know of your love for Applejack!"

The unicorn turned to the pagecolt with wide eyes. "You told him, then?"

"He told me everything! I came here to tell you that you can't have him, even if you won't have me!"

She narrowed her eyes at him angrily. "And why not?"

"Because..." Spike stammered as he tried to come up with an excuse. "Because..."

An idea struck him as he caught sight of Applejack and Twilight. He

walked over to them and brought their hooves together.

"He's betrothed to my sister!"

"WHAT?!"

The word came from many mouths: Rarity's, Flash Sentry's, Twilight's, Applebloom's and Applejack's. Twilight and Applejack, of course, were the most stunned.

"Yes!" Spike declared. "I rather like having Applejack in the household, and I should like him in the family! Besides, it's obvious that he and my sister hold an attachment to one another! He will certainly love my sister more than he will ever love you!"

"Spike, trust me, this is not the solution!" Applejack exclaimed.

"And it's impossible!" Twilight insisted.

"Yeah!" Applebloom protested, tugging her sister away. "Applejack *can't* marry her!"

"He most certainly cannot!" Rarity cried.

"I agree!" Flash Sentry shouted, pulling Twilight into his hooves.

"Stick to your duty, soldier!" Spike commanded. "How is this any of your business?!"

"Because Twilight and I are engaged!"

"Applejack and I are married!" Rarity shouted at the same time.

"WHAT?!"

This was said by everyone, except Rarity and Flash. Applejack grew pale at Rarity's declaration, not understanding how it was possible. Applebloom's mouth was open, not believing her sister would do such a thing. Twilight felt a mix of confusion and fear for both claims.

Spike was not sure what news shocked him more: that his sister was engaged to some random guard, or his pagecolt, whom he had

trusted as a friend, had betrayed him for the mare he loved.

"What?" he said again, his voice barely above a whisper.

"It's true!" Flash exclaimed, pulling Twilight closer. "We promised ourselves to each other but a few days ago!"

"I didn't want to tell you until the time was right!" Twilight explained. "You had enough problems of your own to deal with!"

Spike waved them off. "We'll discuss this later!" He turned to Applejack. "You're her *husband* ?!"

"Yes, he is!" Rarity declared. "He can't deny it!"

"Yes, I can!" Applejack insisted. "Because I'm not!"

"No need to be afraid, my love. He was bound to find out sooner or later."

Spike felt his heart shatter into millions of pieces. As he looked at the couple, he realized that it was not the sight of Rarity that hurt him most, but Applejack.

"You're lying!" he choked, tears forming in his eyes.

"She is!" Applejack cried. "I never married her!"

"He couldn't have!" Applebloom exclaimed. "That would be illegal!"

"What?" Rarity uttered. "Of course, it's legal! I'll prove it to you! Pinkie, go get the priest! He should still be in the grounds!"

Pinkie nodded and bounced away to fulfill this request.

"Spike," Twilight said, "what she's saying can't be true!"

"Please, Spike!" Applejack pleaded. "I don't love her!"

"That's not what you said last night!" Rarity exclaimed.

The dragon gasped. "You've *been* with her?!"

"Of course, he hasn't!" Twilight proclaimed, moving between her brother and the couple. "If he had, Rarity most certainly would not have married him!"

"What are you implying?!" Rarity growled. "No, we did not go that far, but he was with me all of last night!"

"That's a lie!" Applebloom shouted. "Applejack was with *me* last night! He went straight to bed!"

Rarity turned around to see Pinkie Pie coming with the priest. "Here comes the Father! He will confirm my story!" As soon as the priest was at her side, she took his hoof and moved him between her and Applejack. "Father, I know we said we wanted to keep it secret, but I ask you now to reveal what happened between me and this colt but an hour ago!"

The priest glanced between the couple. "I joined them in the sacred bonds of holy matrimony, until death do they part. They said their vows, exchanged rings, signed the marriage contract and sealed it with a holy kiss."

Spike narrowed his eyes at the pagecolt. "You liar! This was all a trick, wasn't it?! You pretended to be my friend, even tried to persuade me to find another mare, just so you could have her for yourself!"

"My lord, it's all a lie!" Applejack protested.

"Stop it!" Rarity commanded, pulling her by the foreleg. "You don't need to serve him anymore! You're better than him!"

"Get yerr hooves off me, ya crazy mare!"

She spoke in her feminine voice as she wrenched herself out of the unicorn's grasp and fell to her knees in front of her master.

"Spike, listen to me!" she pleaded. "I would never betray you, never!"

The dragon held up his claw. "I've heard enough. You can have her! And may you rot in Hell for your treachery!"

Her heart crumbled as he turned his back to her. "Spike, please, you must believe me! I would never marry her! I don't love *her* , I love *you* !"

Every pony gasped and Spike spun around in shock. Applejack froze at what she had just revealed.

"I mean..." she stammered. "I...love you as my master and friend. More than I could ever love her!"

Twilight put her hoof to her head. "Oh for goodness... Fine! If you won't tell him, I will! It's time we put an end to this nonsense! Spike, Applejack is really a..."

She was interrupted by a wail of agony. Every pony turned to see Sir Soarin flying up to them, covering his face and howling in pain.

"Some pony!" he cried. "Any pony! Get me a doctor! Now!"

"Soarin!" Rainbow shrieked, flying to his side. "What's wrong?"

"He attacked us! We didn't stand a chance! He's a demon, he is! He cut my face!"

"Here, let me see."

He removed Soarin's hoof and frowned when he saw the wound.

"Soarin, it's barely the size of a paper cut."

"But it hurts!"

Rainbow rolled his eyes. "Geez, what a baby."

But he took a piece off his shirt anyway and wrapped it around his friend's head.

"Thanks, Dash," Soarin sniffed.

"Now, who did this to you?" Rainbow asked softly.

"That confounded pagecolt, Applejack! He attacked us from behind! We thought him a coward, but he's deadlier than a Timberwolf!

Discord is even more hurt! Blood everywhere!"

Rainbow raised an eyebrow. "Can't Discord just heal himself with his magic?"

"Yes, but after he did that, he was still in pain! That Applejack wouldn't leave him alone! He's vicious, I tell you! Vicious!"

Spike blinked and pointed at Applejack. " *This* guy attacked you?"

Soarin turned and shrieked at the sight of the pagecolt. He leapt into Rainbow's hooves.

"Don't let him hurt me! Don't let him hurt me!"

"What are you talking about?" Applejack demanded. "I never hurt you! If you're talking about yesterday, *you* were the one who challenged *me* !"

"When did he do this?" Spike asked.

"Just now!" Soarin declared.

"But Applejack's been here this whole time," said Twilight.

"My mind is jumbled!" Pinkie cried.

Soarin suddenly shrieked again and pulled himself tighter to Rainbow Dash.

"Sweet Celestia! There's *two* of them!"

"Boy," Rainbow said. "Maybe he hit your head too."

"No, look!"

Every pony stood still as a stallion looking a great deal like Applejack, only taller and with a stronger built, came up to them with a sword in his hoof.

"I'm sorry, dear!" Big Macintosh said to Rarity. "I hurt your uncle! I didn't mean to. I was only defending myself. Well, he's alright now, anyway. He had some freaky magic."

Rarity's lip quivered as she tried to find words. Before she could, Big Mac turned his head and gasped at the sight of his friend in chains.

"Trixie!" he shouted, rushing to the blue unicorn. "Oh, Trixie!"

"Big Mac?" Trixie questioned. "Is that you?"

"Of course, it's me! What's happened to you?"

"What's happened to *me* ? What's happened to *you* ?"

"I got lost trying to find the Sugar Cube and then this crazy jester dragged me to..."

"No, no! What I mean is...what spell? How...how are there two of you?"

Big Mac blinked. "Two of me?"

She pointed over his shoulder. Big Mac spun around and dropped his sword at what he saw. The crowd parted to reveal a pony with the clothes of a stallion and the face of a mare. It was almost like looking in a mirror, only with a smaller reflection.

Neither of them could move. They only stared at each other, their green eyes wide with amazement.

Her hair was cut, her attire was not hers, but the face was unmistakable.

"Applejacqueline?"

His coat had changed, so had his hair. He had dropped some weight, but she could recognize him anywhere.

"Big Mac?"

The spectators watched the strange scene, all of them completely befuddled.

"Applejacqueline?" Spike whispered.

"Big Mac?" Rarity uttered.

The two look-alikes took cautious steps towards each other, their eyes never breaking contact. When they were a single step apart, they paused and continued to stare. After a long period of silence, Applejack raised her hooves to the stallion's face and his to hers.

"Is it really you?" they said simultaneously.

"Big brother?"

Big Macintosh looked down and his heart leapt with joy at the sight of his youngest sister.

"Applebloom?"

"You're alive?" all three of them said.

Tears filled their eyes as they finally flung their hooves around each other.

"Big Mac!" the girls cried.

"Applejacqueline! Applebloom!" their brother rejoiced. "Oh, my sisters! I thought you had drowned!"

"We thought the same of you!" Applejack declared.

" *I* didn't!" Applebloom said proudly. "I knew you were alive! I just knew it!"

He pulled away from his sisters and looked them over. "Why are you wearing my clothes?"

"Why are you orange?" Applejack asked in return.

"Hold up!" Spike yelled, putting up his claws. "Could some pony please explain to me what's going on here?!"

"That's what *I'd* like to know!" Rarity exclaimed, putting her hooves on her hips.

"Even I want an explanation!" Rainbow declared.

"My head hurts!" Pinkie screamed, holding her head in her hooves.

"Don't let them hurt me!" Soarin shrieked.

"I want answers too," Applejack said to her brother. "Where've you been all this time?"

"Trixie rescued me," Big Mac replied, pointing his head towards the chained unicorn. "She nursed me back to health." He glanced down at his coat. "She tried a spell to heal me, but it turned me orange instead. I came into town yesterday to find a way to get home, but I got a little sidetracked..."

He blushed with embarrassment as he looked over at Rarity, whose face was even paler than usual. Applejack shook her head with a chuckle.

"I can explain that." She turned to the crowd. "My real name is Lady Applejacqueline of Haystings. This here's my brother, Duke Macintosh II. Ya see, brother, after Applebloom and I washed ashore, I had to find a way to take care of her, and the best way for me to do that was to dress up as a stallion. We found yerr clothes on the beach. I entered the Duke's service and have been passin' messages between him and the Lady Rarity."

"You mean..." Rarity uttered. "I...I fell in love with a...with a..."

Big Mac was there just in time to catch her. He laughed as the pieces started coming together.

"You thought I was my sister," he smirked.

"I didn't know she was your sister!" Rarity insisted. "I didn't even know she was a *she* !"

"It's funny. If I hadn't come here, you would've been married to a mare!"

"And that's not legal!" Pinkie Pie piped. "Not for another four hundred years, anyway!"

"I hope this doesn't change things between us," Big Mac said, taking Rarity's hooves. "I was bewitched the moment I laid eyes on you and I will still be yerr loyal husband."

Rarity nodded with a smile. "Yes. It seems nature has been kind and has turned my mistaken affection for your sister into real affection for you."

"Then you still love me?"

She giggled. "Eeyup."

Applejack and Applebloom watched in awe as their brother rubbed noses with his new wife. They gasped as his fur slowly turned from orange back to its natural red.

"Oh, *now* the spell wears off," Trixie grumbled.

"Wait just a minute!"

Applejack's face fell as Spike approached her.

"Let me get this straight." He raised his eyebrow at her. "You were a mare this whole time?"

She nodded solemnly. The dragon turned to Applebloom.

"And what are you? A colt?"

"Nope," Applebloom said, shaking her head. "I'm as much a filly as she is."

Spike looked back at his pagecolt (or pagefilly, really). He watched as her cheeks grew red, giving her face a slight glow. She brushed her straw-colored mane away from the glimmering emeralds that were her eyes. Those were the things he had found most attractive about her when they had first met. Had she always been this pretty, or was he only seeing it now that he knew her true gender?

Her beauty seemed to grow with every second he stared at her. Even in a stallion's clothes, she was gorgeous in his eyes. The most astonishing thing was that she was not even trying. Her beauty was natural. Everything about her was natural, now that she was being herself for the first time.

He remembered the hours they had spent together conversing,

laughing, simply enjoying each other's company. Everything had been so easy with her. As he was recalling these memories, he remembered her shimmering eyes gazing at him, much like the gaze they were giving him now. They were filled with so much emotion, emotion that he knew all too well.

"Applejack," he said, slowly stepping closer to her. "You told me once that...if you should ever love a male, it would be...me."

Applejack winced, but realized there was no use hiding anymore. She opened her eyes and bravely lifted them to meet his.

"I...I meant every word I said. The disguise might have been a lie, but everything else...wasn't." A lump formed in her throat as the next words came out. "I...I love ya, Spike. I always have."

There was silence again, until Spike crossed his arms and said, "You're so fired."

Applejack's eyes widened. "What?!"

"What?!" Twilight said. She rushed to her brother's side. "Spike, you can't! I mean I know she lied about her gender, but must you be so cruel as to...?"

Spike held up his claw. "I wasn't finished!" He faced Applejack again. "As you are a mare, I can no longer keep you as my pagecolt."

Applejack hung her head in shame.

"Instead..."

Her head shot up as he took her hoof in his claws and slowly dropped to one knee.

"I wish to take you as my wife."

Every pony let out a gasp, but no pony was as shocked as Applejack.

"Oh, Spike!" she cried. "Yes! YES!"

With tears of joy, she embraced the dragon she loved and Spike smiled as he slowly put his arms around her. Once they pulled out of their embrace, her lips came crashing down on his and Spike had never tasted anything sweeter.

All the passion Applejack had been holding back was being released, as she pulled her beloved in closer, deepening their kiss. One of his claws found its way into her hair and got lost in the softness of it.

The crowd sighed in awe at the sweet sight, though Rainbow Dash was slightly disgusted.

"Hallelujah!" Pinkie sang. "Hallelujah!"

"Pinkie?" Rainbow uttered. "What are you doing?"

The jester shrugged. "Seemed appropriate."

A thought then occurred to Rainbow. He looked at Soarin and then back at the couple.

"Uh, every pony?" he called.

Spike and Applejack finally broke their kiss and turned to the knight. Rainbow set Soarin down before continuing.

"I have a confession to make too." His cheeks blushed a deep pink. "I...I'm a mare too."

There was silence for a moment. Then Pinkie Pie shrugged.

"Eh, I knew it all along."

"It *was* kind of obvious," said Applejack.

"Eeyup," Big Mac agreed.

Every pony else nodded.

"What, really?" Rainbow uttered.

"Wait!" Soarin exclaimed. "You're a chick?" He paused and then

grinned. "That makes you even more awesome!"

Rainbow gasped as he jumped back into her hooves.

"Soarin, what are you...?"

She was cut off as the knight pressed his lips against hers. She was shocked at first, but then smiled.

"Oh, Soarin," she moaned as she kissed him back.

"Aw!" Pinkie sighed. "True love! Ain't it great?"

"It sure is," Spike giggled as he turned back to Applejack. "You know something funny? I kept seeing you in my dreams. I thought I was crazy! I didn't know why I felt so comfortable with you, why I wanted to do nothing but smile when I was with you, why I had the strange desire to have you near." He took her hooves in his claws. "I think I was falling for you too."

"Really?" Applejack asked in disbelief.

"Really." He cringed suddenly. "So your name is really *Applejacqueline* ?"

She nodded.

"Can I still call you Applejack? It suits you better."

"I don't mind. Frankly, I've gotten used to it."

He smiled and backed away to look at her. "I wish to see you in your mare's clothes."

She chuckled. "I'm afraid I haven't got any. I left them with Captain Iron Will, the minotaur who brought me to you. He's probably halfway to Haystings by now."

"Captain Iron Will?"

Every pony looked over at Trixie, still in chains.

"I know him!" she declared. "He was in the cell across from me!"

"Cell?" Applejack said, standing up in alarm. "He's in prison?!"

"Yes! He said some donkey put him in there for squirting juice on his shirt!"

"Well that's dumb," Applebloom said.

"Wait," Rarity said, tapping her chin. "By any chance was this donkey really cranky?"

Trixie nodded. "That's how he described him."

Rarity turned to Soarin and Rainbow, who were still in their romantic embrace.

"Would one of you lovebirds go and fetch Cranky so that he may release the captain?"

The pegasi pulled apart at the mention of the donkey.

"Oh yeah," Rainbow said, smiling nervously. "Cranky..."

"Oh, I've forgotten," Rairty said, putting her hoof to her head. "He hasn't been in his wits lately. With all the excitement, he had slipped my mind! Where is he, anyway?"

"Ooh!" Pinkie piped, taking a paper out of her pocket. "That reminds me! Cranky told me to give you this letter!"

"What does it say?"

The jester cleared her throat and spoke in a loud, booming voice. " *My lady, you have done me wrong, by the fires of* ...!"

"Why are you talking like that?" Rarity interrupted.

"I'm reading it like some pony who's crazy. It's fun!"

The white unicorn took the parchment out of the fool's hoof and handed it to Rainbow. " *You* read it."

The pegasus mare nodded. " *My dear lady, you have done me wrong. You have shut me in darkness, treated me like a mad*

donkey and sent ministers to cleanse my soul. I humbly ask the reason why and that you come to me in person to give me an explanation. Sincerely yours, The Unjustly Wronged Cranky ."

"He does not sound mad," Rarity observed. "Rainbow, Soarin, go set him free and return him here."

This made both pegasi uneasy, but they followed her orders anyway. Rarity turned to the Duke.

"I hope there are no hard feelings, my lord," she said softly. "It seems we've both found happiness anyway. I ask that you'll think of me as a sister rather than a wife, as we'll soon be in-laws."

"I should like that very much," Spike said with a grin. Then he turned to his sister. "Now, about your engagement..."

"Please, my lord," Flash said, putting his hoof around Twilight. "I love Twilight and she loves me. I may not have much, but I promise I will make her happy..."

"Whoa, take it easy there! I was just going to give you my blessing."

Twilight gasped. "Really?"

"I was worried that you would never find love because of me. How can I say no to this?"

Tears formed in the purple unicorn's eyes. "Oh, thank you, brother! Hey! We can have a double wedding!"

"Make it a triple!" Rarity insisted. "So that we can make ours more official! Oh! And we can have it at my house tomorrow!"

"Ooh!" Pinkie Pie chimed. "It can be a quadruple wedding with Rainbow and Soarin! OH MY GOSH! THIS WILL BE THE MOST AMAZING WEDDING EVER!"

"Whoa, whoa!" called Rainbow's voice. "Isn't that going a bit too fast?"

She and Soarin were dragging Cranky by his forelegs. He was in

really bad shape, wearing a ragged white shirt and pants, his toupee gone from his bald head!

"Goodness, Cranky!" Rarity exclaimed, rushing over to him. "You look awful! Positively awful!"

"No thanks to you!" Cranky snapped. "How could you do this to me, madam? After years of loyal service..."

"Whatever are you talking about?"

"This note you sent me!" He reached into the pocket of his trousers and handed a parchment to her. "It's in your writing! You cannot deny that you told me to wear lime green stockings and a fez, to smile and act cheerful all the time! You made me look like an idiot! Was this some cruel joke of yours? I did not think you capable of..."

"Cranky, this isn't my writing."

"Of course, it is! Whose else would it be?"

"Fluttershy's."

"Did I offend you in some way that you...? Fluttershy's?"

"Yes. Although it looks a great deal like mine, it is most definitely hers. See, I often write with my horn and she writes in her mouth, so hers is a little sloppier." She paused. "Now that I think about it, Fluttershy was the first one to tell me you were insane. Though I have no idea why she would..."

She trailed off as she spied Rainbow, Soarin and Pinkie Pie trying to sneak away.

"Hold on, you three!"

They all stopped in their tracks and winced. Rarity crossed her hooves at them.

"You wouldn't happen to know anything about this, would you?"

They slowly faced her, wearing nervous smiles. She scrutinized

them all.

"One of you, start talking. Now!"

"I was framed!" Soarin cried, hiding behind Rainbow Dash.

The pegasus mare sighed in defeat.

"Okay, fine! So we pulled a fast one on Cranky! But it was all in good fun, right?"

The glares she received said otherwise.

"It was all Discord's idea!" Rainbow insisted. "Well, Fluttershy came up with the letter, but only because Discord wanted revenge on Cranky for humiliating him. Well, we all wanted to get back at him, really. But you know, I'm sure we're all going to laugh about this one day! I mean if it hadn't been for that prank, Discord and Fluttershy would've never gotten hitched!"

Rarity gasped. "They *what* ?!"

"Oops. But really! You know what they say! An eye for an eye. Cranky humiliated us, we humiliated him."

"I was part of this too!" Pinkie exclaimed proudly, turning to Cranky. "I'm sure you remember," she spoke in her old stallion's voice, "Father Puddinghead!" The donkey gritted his teeth at her. "Aw, don't be so cranky, Cranky! You remember! Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrown in their face with a cream pie!" The jester crossed her forelegs. "You know, this never would've happened if you had just been my friend."

Cranky growled at the three. "I'll get you for this! I'll have my revenge on every single one of you!"

He then ran angrily into the house.

"Poor dear," Rarity said, shaking her head. "He has been greatly abused."

Spike turned to one of his guards. "Go after him and calm him down.

He has not told us of the captain yet. Well, no matter. I'm still Duke. I'll go down to the prison and free him myself. When that's taken care of," he took the hooves of his beloved, "we'll all get married."

"One thing I don't get," Soarin declared, looking at Rainbow Dash. "Why did *you* dress up as a dude?"

Rainbow sighed. "Father was a knight, wanted to be a knight too, couldn't, 'cuz I'm a girl, Father died, went to orphanage, found Scootaloo, both ran away, I became a knight, she became my squire."

"Oh," the pegasus stallion nodded. "Now I get why you never wanted to dress in the same tent. And why you didn't want me to marry Rarity."

She blushed with a smile. "Well...you're kind of a baby, but you're also cute."

"So is that a yes on the quadruple wedding?" Pinkie demanded.

Rainbow and Soarin glanced at each other and shrugged.

"Eh, why not?" they said.

"It's settled then," Spike declared. "Come on, Applejack, let's go get your captain."

Applejack had never felt so happy. Not only had her brother come back from the dead, but the love of her life loved her in return. She could not help but laugh at what it had taken for them to get here. If their ship had not crashed and she had not put on the disguise, she would have never met Spike.

"I guess all things happen for a reason," she muttered to herself.

She did not think anyone had heard her, but Spike had, and he understood what she meant. Even if Applejack had come to serve him as a mare, he did not think he would have gotten to know her the way he had when she was a stallion. He hoped to see her in her true garments soon, but in truth, he did not care.

It did not matter what she wore. Her beauty shone through her attire like the sun. Her appearance also did not matter. She was everything he had ever wanted in a mare: honest (aside from the whole disguise), dependable, caring, and the only one who could put up with all his stupidity.

Mare or stallion, she would always be his Applejack, the pony of his dreams.

We're not done yet! There's still the epilogue!

Yeah, you all knew RD was a girl. Really no secret. That was not in the play, it's just that there are so few girls in Shakespeare but so many in MLP. I also kind of felt a little bad for Sir Andrew (Soarin) even if he was annoying. It was only fair he got a girl too.

Hey, Shakespeare comedies always have mega-happy endings!

Epilogue

Okay, got it done quicker than I thought.

The reunion of the Apple siblings and their dear captain was a happy one. Iron Will was surprised to see Big Macintosh, but he was so overjoyed, he did not ask questions, at least not until they had finished their embraces.

The Duke released Trixie as well, since she had saved both his fiancée and his future brother-in-law. However, she was warned that if she committed any more offenses, she would be imprisoned permanently.

Iron Will still had Applejack's old garments, but they were so tattered that she did not bother wearing them. Instead, she borrowed one of Twilight's gowns and Spike was fully convinced that there was no sight lovelier than that of his beloved.

A grand wedding took place the next day, where the four happy couples were married by Princess Celestia herself. Applebloom, Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo were the flower girls, while Button Mash carried the rings.

As each of the couples were pronounced husbands and wives, every pony rejoiced. Well, except for one.

Trixie sat slumped in her seat, her forelegs crossed as she sadly watched Big Macintosh kiss his new bride. Iron Will, who was sitting next to her, noticed her expression. After having everything explained to him, he had made the connection between Trixie and Big Macintosh.

"You okay?" he asked her.

"Yeah," she grumbled. "I'll be fine."

"Well," he sighed, "don't worry about it. There are other fish in the sea."

"You have someone special in your life?"

"No, not yet."

"What are you going to do after this?"

"The Duke granted Iron Will a ship. After Iron Will sails Big Mac and his wife back to Haystings, he's going to retire, see the world, go wherever the wind takes him."

Trixie looked the minotaur over, briefly admiring the muscles in his chest.

"Mind if Trixie comes with you?"

Being married to Big Macintosh made Rarity the new Duchess of Haystings, which meant she had to sail back with him. This made Sweetie Belle the new heir to the manor, but as she was so young, Rarity left Discord and Fluttershy as caretakers. She was quite upset with what her uncle had done to Cranky, but seeing that being married to Fluttershy had created a change in him, she forgave him. They appointed Soarin and Rainbow Dash as captains of their guard, despite the latter being female. With them, they brought Scootaloo and Button Mash, much to Sweetie Belle's delight.

Rarity felt it was best to let Cranky go, as the trick pulled on him had affected him greatly. Pinkie Pie, feeling bad for what she had taken part in, introduced Cranky to a female donkey named Matilda. Let's just say that Cranky is not so cranky anymore.

The ponies of Haystings rejoiced at their duke's miraculous return, and rejoiced even more when they saw he had come home with a bride. Big Mac's Aunt and Uncle Orange, who had been running things in his absence, were shocked and relieved to see him, as they had thought he and his sisters had drowned.

Applejack stayed in Illyrimane with her new husband. Applebloom continued to live them, so she could still visit Sweetie Belle and their new playmates. Twilight and Flash set out to travel the world while

Spike and Applejack ruled Illyrimane.

There had never been a finer Duke and Duchess. They ruled with justice and generosity, helping those less fortunate and giving every pony, even criminals, a chance. Applejack insisted that they give mares high positions in their court, a request which Spike was happy to oblige. His new wife had changed his view entirely on females, that they were as equal as males.

Spike planted some apple trees in the garden just for his wife. The manor is gone now, but the trees still stand today as a reminder of the great romance that took place there.

As for the fool, Pinkie Pie, she decided it was time to hit the road again. After the wedding reception, she packed her instruments and skipped down the trail. She came to rest on a cliff overlooking the sea. She breathed in the salty air and looked out on the horizon.

"If we shadows have offended,

Think but this and all is mended..."

Wrong play, Pinkie.

"Oh. Well then... It is not the fashion to see the mare the epilogue..."

Wrong play!

"A glooming peace this morning with it brings..."

Pinkie! Didn't you get the script?

Pinkie took out a thick booklet and flipped to the last page.

"Oh, okay! Now I remember!"

She cleared her throat and began to sing:

" *When that I was but a little tiny foal,*

With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,

A foolish thing was but a troll,

For the rain is raining every day.

" *But when I came to mare's estate,*

With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,

'Gainst knaves and thieves mares shut their gate,

For the rain is raining every day.

" *But if I came, alas, to wed,*

With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,

My husband would have sooner fled,

For the rain is raining every day.

" *But when I came unto my beds,*

With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,

With cupcakes still had drunken heads,

For the rain is raining every day.

" *A great while ago the world begun,*

With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,

But that's all one, our story's done,

And we'll strive to please you every day. "

Then the jester took off her hat and held it out in front of her.

"So give us your money, Bronies! Storytelling ain't free!"

Don't worry, she's kidding!

Now you know. TrixiexIron Will is my crack pairing. Because

they keep referring to themselves in the third person and are show people, err, creatures, I thought it would be funny if they got together! Also, what I didn't like in the play was that Antonio did not get a happy ending. He didn't get his love interest, if he was set free, it was never mentioned. And I thought, why not?

In case you're wondering, the lines Pinkie said at the end were from the ending monologues/epilogues of, in order, *A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It, Romeo and Juliet* and, of course, *Twelfth Night* .

I am more relieved than sad that this is done. While it was fun to combine my favorite play with my favorite show, I didn't think I would ever get this done! I don't think I'll be doing more Shakespony any time soon, but CartoonNerd12 is doing something similar with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* . I suggest you check it out.

Until next time, every pony!